

川上 稔

イラスト・さとやす (TENKY)

GENESIS ネーゾ

境界線上の ホライゾン IV 中



GENESISシリーズ
境界線上のホライゾンIV(中)

奥州上越関東の安定化のための外交作戦として、里見生徒会長を招き入れ、列強三國へ外交官を派遣することを決定した武蔵。

その結果、最上家へ里見義康とアデーレが、上越露西亜の上杉家にトリー、ホライゾン、メアリ、古蔵、ミトツグイラが、伊達家には鈴とウルクアガが外交官として赴くこととなった。

だがその一方、武蔵内部に潜入した伊佐、穴山たち真田十勇士は密かに活動を始め、更には武蔵の眼下、水戸領地に対し前線勢が戦闘を開始。事態は急速に動き出す！

各国に分割統治された中世の神州・日本を舞台に繰り広げる、壮大な戦国学園ファンタジー、第四話中巻。



川上 稔

か-5-38

境界線上のホライゾンIV(中)

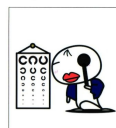
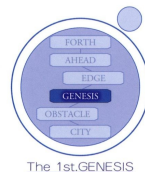
川上 稔

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川上 稔

1975年1月3日生まれ。東京出身。コミック連載に続き、ついに『境界線上のホライゾン』のアニメがスタート。フィギュアを始め、様々な商品化も進行中で、電撃やら艦載やらで大家ですが、タココー一番楽しんでるようです。

【電撃文庫作品】

新シリーズ
パンツァー・ボリス1835
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AHEADシリーズ

終わりのクロニクル①～⑦
GENESISシリーズ
境界線上のホライゾン I～III
境界線上のホライゾンIV(上)(中)

【電撃の単行本】

速射王(上)(下)

イタス:たとえず(TENKY)

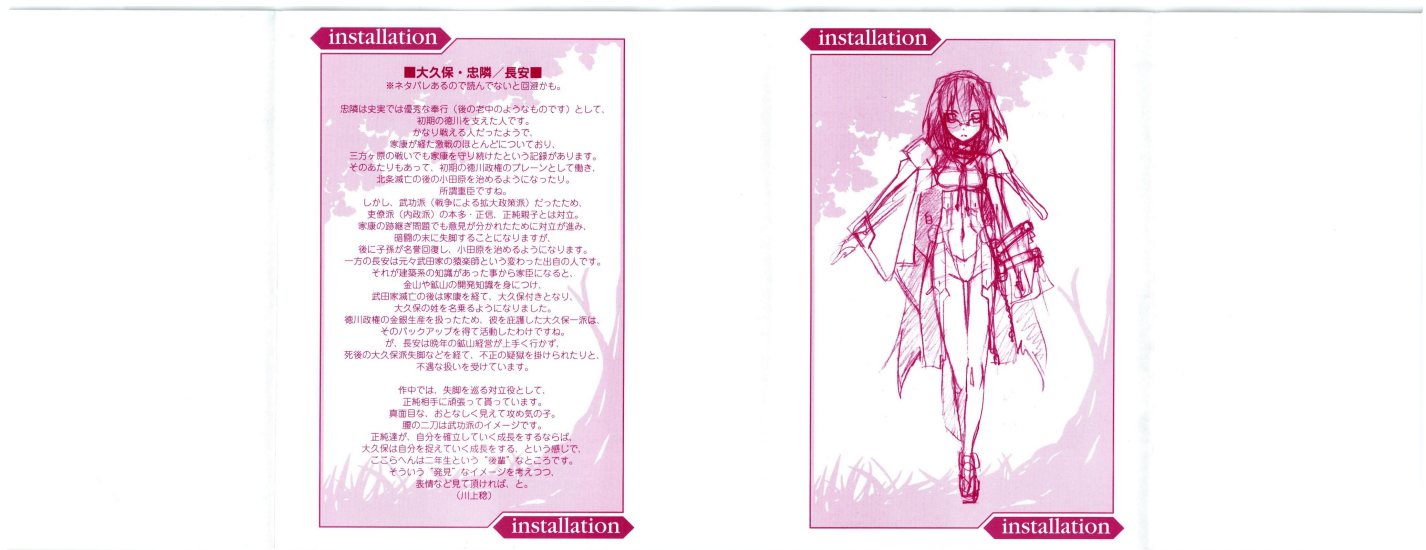
山所をまわりの戦術書『サルゲゾンズ』を食でいじがに、おじつライを買いに行くすばあ。最近はおススカツ其れ好みです。新装版。

カバー：田村明





Installation



Ookubo Tadachika/Nagayasu

※Spoilers, so maybe avoid this if you haven't read it yet.

In actual history, Tadachika was a skilled magistrate (something like the Elders that came later) and supported Tokugawa in the early days.

He apparently could fight quite well, joined Ieyasu in most of his fierce battles, and continued to protect Ieyasu even during the Battle of Mikatagahara.

That may be part of why he worked as the brain of the early Tokugawa administration and ruled Odawara after the fall of Houjou.

He was what they call a chief retainer.

But he was a military type (focused on expansion through war), so he came into conflict with Honda Masanobu and Masazumi who were public servant types (focused on domestic affairs).

Since their opinions differed on who should succeed Ieyasu, their conflict continued and their secret feud led to his fall, but a descendant of his later regained the family's honor and ruled over Odawara once more.

Meanwhile, Nagayasu had the unusual origin of starting out as a Sarugaku performer for the Takeda clan.

He was made a retainer due to his knowledge of architecture, he learned how to develop gold mines and other mines, he joined Ieyasu after the fall of the Takeda clan, and he became a part of the Ookubo clan, allowing him to use the Ookubo name.

The Ookubo faction protected him since he managed the gold and silver production of the Tokugawa administration, so he was able to act with their backing.

However, his management of the mines did not go so well in his later years and the Ookubo faction fell after his death, so an illegitimate scandal was attributed to him and he was treated very poorly.

In the novels, I've drawn on the conflict that led to Tadachika's fall to have her work hard against Masazumi.

She's diligent and obedient-looking, but actually quite willing to go on the offensive.

The two swords she carries are to give her that military image.

If Masazumi and the others are establishing themselves as they grow, then Ookubo is grasping who she is as she grows. For that reason, I made her a second year underclassman.

I hope you can keep that image of "discovery" in mind as you look at her expression.

(Kawakami Minoru)



——きっと、大丈夫だよ。

IV

中

川上 稔

イラスト・さとやす (TENKY)

—We'll surely be okay



上越露西亞協賛

本庄家主催

有明花火大会

協賛リンク集

春日GALA宮殿
今日の雷帝様
愛人と仲良くね！
繁子の部屋
伊達巻き胸
上テンション下
一杯やろうか
コンコン母様
お困り姫
IZUMO本社
生徒会だぎゃああ！
オクスフォードTRUMPS

協賛募集のお知らせ

上越露西亞では各所での
花火大会に協賛される
同志を求めています。
楯として砲弾を防げる方。
是非、防いでみないか！

今年もまた花火大会の
季節が懲りずにやって
参りました。
今年の舞台は有明。
打ち込むのは数千発の
術式砲弾で一尺玉も
TAKUSANですよ。
ええ、屋台も出ますので
皆様ウオツカばかり
飲んでないで清酒も
飲みには是非。

Far Right (black with orange outline): Sponsored by Honjou Clan

Right: Ariake Fireworks Festival

Left: Authorized by Sviet Rus

Bottom Right:

The fireworks festival season didn't learn its lesson last year, so here it is again.

This year's stage is the Ariake.

Thousands of spell shells will be fired and "lots" of smaller fireworks will be set off.

Yes, and there will be plenty of festival stands, so at least try to put the vodka down long enough to try some sake.

Bottom Left:

Links from our Partners

Kasuga Gora Kremlin

Today's Ivan the Terrible

Be Friends with the Man of Love!

Shigeko's Room

Date Wrapped Chest

High Energy Low

How About a Drink?

Kon Kon Mother

Troubled Princess

IZUMO HQ

We're the Student Councilllllllll

Oxford Trumps

Requesting More Partners

Sviet Rus is searching for comrades to assist with the fireworks festival.

If you can act as a shield and defend against shells, could you please do some defending!?

極東史

AIRLADUST

始めに

歴史の中では重要人物ほど
派手に動き回ったり騒いだりするという
そんな事実を確かめる助けになれば幸いだったり



IV〈中〉

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First of all

The more important the person in history

The more impressively they moved around and the greater a commotion they caused

Hopefully, learning that will be of some help

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Illustrations: Satoyasu (TENKY)

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Book Design Concept: TENKY

● 武蔵

 <p>葵・喜美 トーリの姉でエロとダンスの神を信仰する。基本的に高圧で応用的に身勝手。</p>	 <p>葵・トーリ 主人公。武蔵アリアダスト学院の総長兼生徒会長。“不可能男”。</p>
 <p>浅間・智 武蔵の主社である浅間神社の娘。トーリや喜美の幼馴染み兼人生の被害者。</p>	 <p>東 帝の子供で半神。能力など全て封じられて武蔵で生活する。</p>
 <p>アデーレ・バルフェット 仏蘭西から流れてきた従士家系。眼鏡娘。</p>	 <p>伊藤・健児 快活なインキュバス。全裸で禿のマッスル系。通称イケン。</p>
 <p>御広敷・銀二 ハート様系体格の食通でオタク。</p>	 <p>キヨナリ・ウルキアガ 第二特務。航空系半竜で異端審問官志望。通称ウッキー。</p>
 <p>シロジロ・ベルトーニ 会計。武蔵の商工会の若手幹部。</p>	 <p>点蔵・クロスユナイト 第一特務。いつも帽子などで顔を隠す忍者で使い走り。</p>
 <p>トゥーサン・ネシンバラ 書記。歴史好きの作家志望者で同人作家。</p>	 <p>直政 第六特務。機関部で働く姉御。煙草はふかすわデカイ声で笑うわで。</p>
 <p>ネイト・ミツダイラ 第五特務。水戸松平の襲名者で騎士家系。人狼ハーフ。</p>	 <p>ネンジ HP3くらいのスライム。男らしい。</p>
 <p>ノリキ 家族を支える勤労少年。不器用型格闘家。無口で無愛想。</p>	 <p>ハイディ・オーゲザヴァラー 会計補佐。シロジロのパートナーで白狐エリマキつき。</p>
 <p>ハッサン・フルブシ カルピスマーク系インド人。カレーだけ食って飲んで生きてる。</p>	 <p>ペルソナ君 バケツヘルムの超マッチョ。無口で怪力で心優しい。</p>
 <p>ホライゾン・アリアダスト トーリの幼馴染みで現三河君主。現在自動人形中。感情が大罪武装の部品として奪われている。</p>	 <p>本多・二代 元三河の学生。本多・忠勝の息女。自称拙者、御座る語尾の濃い目。</p>
 <p>本多・正純 副会長。昨年度の三河からの真面目転入生。いろいろ家庭の事情あり。</p>	 <p>マルガ・ナルゼ 第四特務。黒髪六枚翼の白魔術師。漫研所属。</p>
 <p>マルゴット・ナイト 第三特務。金髪六枚翼の黒魔術師。笑顔の方。</p>	 <p>ミリアム・ボークウ 車椅子生活のため、在宅就学している少女。</p>
 <p>向井・鈴 目が見えないけど頑張る少女。皆のストッパー。</p>	 <p>立花・宗茂 元三征西班牙第一特務。アモーレ。現在は襲名解除で再起願い中。</p>
 <p>立花・間 元三征西班牙第三特務。宗茂の嫁で砲撃系義腕少女。五十回。</p>	 <p>メアリ・スチュアート 英国女王エリザベスの異母姉。金髪巨乳。点蔵の未来嫁として同居中。王賜剣一型のオーナー。</p>
 <p>三科・大 機関部部長の孫娘。メカ好き。直政の後輩にあたる。“だい”じゃなくて“ひろ”。</p>	 <p>三科・翔一 三科・大の父。泰造の義理の息子。関東IZUMOの長。</p>
 <p>里見・義康 里見教導院生徒会長の少女。小さくても泣かない。武神“義”を操る。</p>	 <p>大久保・忠隣／長安 極東には珍しい二重襲名の代表委員長。二年。インチキ関西弁。</p>

character

character

● 教導院関係者

か のう
加納

大久保の侍女。自動人形。風紀委員長。二年。



オリオトライ・真喜子

高速戦闘型女教師。いつもジャージ。



“武蔵”

武蔵を統括する自動人形で総艦長。辛辣口調がたまりません。



“品川”

武蔵右舷一番艦の艦長式自動人形。“浅草”と同型。



“武蔵野”

武蔵中央前艦の艦長式自動人形。艦橋内の長。鈴やアデーレと親しい。



三要・光紀

三年竹組の担任。オリオトライを先輩と仰ぐ。何か微妙に不幸。



酒井・忠次

武蔵アリアダスト学院学長。昔はかなり出来る人でしたが左遷。



“浅草”

武蔵左舷一番艦の艦長式自動人形。短髪。



“奥多摩”

武蔵中央後艦の艦長式自動人形。酒井の家の雑用もする。



ヨシナオ

六護式仏蘭西から派遣された武蔵王。教導院への否決権と武蔵の管理権を持つ。

● M.H.R.R.



羽柴・藤吉郎

M.H.R.R.副会長、自動人形の猿面少女。おどおどボンバー系。



マティアス

M.H.R.R.旧派の代表。総長兼生徒会長。傀儡楽しいです！



福島・正則

羽柴麾下。十本槍のナンバー1。御座ります語尾を使用する。



オリンピア

インノケンティウスの義姉にして義妹。現教皇総長。



前田・利家

旧派の代表。会計。霊体になっており、妻の“まつ”と日々平穏に中間職。



加藤・清正

羽柴麾下。十本槍のナンバー2。金髪巨乳系で丁寧口調。

● P.A.Oda



佐々・成政

P.A.Oda六天魔軍、五大頂の一人。ヤンキー系で突撃派。でも几帳面。



不破・光治

P.A.Odaの対上越露西亜現地会計。利家、成政と三人で“三人衆”と呼ばれる。



丹羽・長秀

六天魔軍、五大頂の二番。切り替えの早い舞踏士。



駒姫

最上・義光の娘で、羽柴・秀次の側室。彼女が連座で自害した事が、最上家の反羽柴への引き金となる。



柴田・勝家

P.A.Oda六天魔軍、五大頂の一人。体育会系。最近結婚して困りもの。



御市

柴田・勝家の妻。おっとり系バーサーカー。



羽柴・秀次

羽柴の甥。歴史再現では羽柴の怒りによって自害する事になる。

character

●伊達家

だて まさむね 伊達・政宗

伊達家の当主。竜神の力を受け継いでいる。伊達家の総長兼生徒会長でもある。

かたくら こじゅうろう 片倉・小十郎

伊達家の副会長。テンション上下が激しいが選択式。

るす まさかげ 留守・政景

伊達家の仙台城管理システム。名字がとにかく紛らわしい。

だて しげざね 伊達・成実

政宗の従弟役。伊達家の副長で、機動殻“不転百足”を使用。余裕あり気味おねーさん風。

おに にわ つなもと 鬼庭・綱元

伊達家の第二特務。鬼型長寿族の武神使い。使用武神は“左月”。

よし ひめ 義姫

政宗の母。鬼型長寿族と人間のハーフ。仙台伊達教導院の学長。

●上越露西亜

マルファ・ボレツカヤ

浮上都市ノヴゴロドを治める女市長の不死系魔神族。

トビー

極東からマルファ麾下になった謎の老人。あまり謎じゃないかも。

ほんじょう しげなが 本庄・繁長

上越露西亜の各地防衛を行う勇将。本庄櫓の使い手。

●最上家

も がみ よしあき 最上・義光

「羽州の狐」と呼ばれる裏切り上等大名。極寒の最上を一代でまとめあげた辣腕。

さけ のべ 鯉延

義光様のフォローをする走狗ですモン!

●他勢力



さる とび きすけ 猿飛・佐助

真田教導院の十勇士の一番。体術と忍術をこなす。



きり がくれ さいぞう 霧隠・才蔵

真田教導院の十勇士の二番。風の移動術をこなす。

み よし い さ 三好・伊佐

真田教導院の十勇士の四番。別名は伊佐入道。制御式の武神を扱う少女。

あな やま こすけ 穴山・小助

真田教導院の十勇士の五番。人の良さそうな顔の男。忍術をこなす。

ゆり かま の すけ 由利・鎌之介

真田教導院の十勇士の六番。剣術を得意とする。

ね づ じん ばち 根津・陣八

真田教導院の十勇士の八番。狙撃を得意とする。

character

● Musashi

- Aoi Kimi: Toori's older sister and worshipper of the god of eroticism and dancing. Fundamentally high-tension and selfish in practice.
- Aoi Toori: Protagonist. Musashi Ariadust Academy's chancellor and student council president. Mr. Impossible.
- Asama Tomo: Daughter of the Asama Shrine, Musashi's main shrine. Childhood friend and overall victim of Toori and Kimi.
- Azuma: Child of the emperor and a half-god. All his abilities have been sealed and he lives on the Musashi.
- Adele Balfette: From a vassal family that arrived from France. Glasses girl.
- Itou Kenji: Cheerful incubus. Nude, bald, and muscular. Known as Itoken.
- Ohiroshiki Ginji: Gourmet otaku with a Heart-sama style build.
- Kiyonari Urquiaga: 2nd special duty officer. Flying half-dragon. Hopes to be an inquisitor. Known as Uqui.
- Shirojiro Bertoni: Treasurer. Young leading member of Musashi's commerce and industry guild.
- Tenzou Crossunite: 1st special duty officer. Ninja and errand-runner who always covers his face with his hat.
- Toussaint Neshinbara: Secretary. Loves history, wants to be an author, and writes doujins.
- Naomasa: 6th special duty officer. Older sister type who works in the engine division. Smokes and laughs loudly.
- Nate Mitotsudaira: 5th special duty officer. Member of a knight family and inheritor of the Mito Matsudaira name. Half werewolf.
- Nenji: Slime with about 3 HP. Manly.
- Noriki: Laborer boy who supports his family. Clumsy martial artist. Silent and unsociable.
- Heidi Augesvarer: Treasurer's aide. Shirojiro's partner. Has a white fox named Erimaki.
- Hassan Furubushi: Calpis logo-style Indian. Lives while eating and drinking only curry.
- Persona-kun: Super macho man with a bucket helmet. Silent, strong, and kindhearted.
- Horizon Ariadust: Toori's childhood friend and current ruler of Mikawa. Currently an automaton. Her emotions were taken as parts for the Logismo Oplo.
- Honda Futayo: Former Mikawa student. Honda Tadakatsu's daughter. Uses a strongly old-fashioned speech pattern.
- Honda Masazumi: Vice president of the student council. Diligent exchange student who arrived from Mikawa the previous year. Has various issues with her family.
- Malga Naruze: 4th special duty officer. Black-haired six-winged Weiss Hexen. Member of the manga club.
- Margot Naito: 3rd special duty officer. Blonde-haired six-winged Schwarz Hexen.

Always smiling.

- Miriam Poqou: Girl who stays in her room because she lives in a wheelchair.
- Mukai Suzu: Blind but always gives it her all. Acts as everyone's stopper.
- Tachibana Muneshige: Former Tres España 1st special duty officer. Amore. Currently working to regain his inherited name.
- Tachibana Gin: Former Tres España 3rd special duty officer. Muneshige's wife and possessor of cannon-style false arms. Fifty times.
- Mary Stuart: Half-sister of English Queen Elizabeth. Well-endowed blonde. Living with Tenzou as his future wife. Owner of Ex. Collbrande.
- Mishina Hiro: Granddaughter of the engine division's chief. Loves mechanical things. Naomasa's underclassman. Her name is pronounced Hiro, not Dai.
- Mishina Shouichi: Mishina Hiro's father. Taizou's son-in-law. Head of Kantou IZUMO.
- Satomi Yoshiyasu: Satomi Academy's student council president. Small but does not cry. Uses the god of war Righteousness.
- Ookubo Tadachika/Nagayasu: A rare Far Easterner with a double inherited name. A second year and head of the representative committee. Speaks in a fake-sounding Kansai dialect.
- Kanou: Ookubo's maid. An automaton. Head of the public morals committee. A second year.

• Academy Officials

- Oriotorai Makiko: High-speed battling teacher. Always wears a track suit.
- Sakai Tadatsugu: Musashi Ariadust Academy's president. Used to be a very able person but was demoted.
- "Musashi": Automaton that supervises the Musashi and overall commander. Her sharp comments are hard to put up with.
- "Asakusa": Captain automaton of Musashi's first port ship. Short hair.
- "Shinagawa": Captain automaton of Musashi's first starboard ship. Same model as "Asakusa".
- "Okutama": Captain automaton of Musashi's rear central ship. Also takes care of odd jobs at Sakai's home.
- "Musashino": Captain automaton of Musashi's front central ship. Leader on the bridge. Close to Suzu and Adele.
- Yoshinao: King of Musashi who was sent from Hexagone Française. Has a veto right toward the academy and has the authority to manage Musashi.
- Sanyou Mitsuki: Class 3-Bamboo's homeroom teacher. Looks up to Oriotorai. Somewhat sensitive and unlucky.

• M.H.R.R.

- Hashiba Toukichirou: M.H.R.R. Vice President and monkey-masked automaton girl.

The nervous bomber type.

- Olimpia: Innocentius's older and younger stepsister. Current Pope-Chancellor.
- Matthias: Representative of M.H.R.R.'s Catholics. Student Council President. Younger brother of Chancellor and Emperor Rudolf II. Being a puppet is fun!
- Maeda Toshiie: Catholic representative. Treasurer. Samurai attendant that has become a ghost and is peacefully spending his days with his wife Matsu.
- Fukushima Masanori: Under Hashiba's direct command. Ten Spears #1. Speaks in an old-fashioned way.
- Katou Kiyomasa: Under Hashiba's direct command. Ten Spears #2. The busty blonde type and speaks politely.

• P.A. Oda

- Sassa Narimasa: One of P.A. Oda's Six Heavenly Demon Army and Five Great Peaks. Delinquent and assault type. But methodical.
- Shibata Katsuie: One of P.A. Oda's Six Heavenly Demon Army and Five Great Peaks. Athletic type. Very troublesome after his recent marriage.
- Fuwa Mitsuharu: P.A. Oda's local anti-Sviet Rus treasurer. Her, Toshiie, and Narimasa are known as the Triumvirate.
- Oichi: Shibata Katsuie's wife. Gentle berserker.
- Niwa Nagahide: #2 of the Six Heavenly Demon Army and Five Great Peaks. A dancer and quick to adapt.
- Hashiba Hidetsugu: Hashiba's nephew. In the history recreation, earns Hashiba's anger and is made to commit suicide.
- Komahime: Mogami Yoshiaki's daughter and Hashiba Hidetsugu's concubine. Her suicide due to guilt by association led to the Mogami clan's anti-Hashiba stance.

• Date Clan

- Date Masamune: Head of the Date clan. Inherits the power of the Dragon God. Chancellor and student council president of the Date clan.
- Date Narumi: Masamune's cousin. Vice chancellor of the Date clan and uses a mobile shell named Unturning Centipede. Confident elder sister type.
- Katakura Kojuurou: Vice president of the Date clan. Full of intense highs and lows.
- Oniniwa Tsunamoto: 2nd special duty officer of the Date clan. Demonic long-lived god of war pilot. Pilots a god of war named Sagetsu.
- Rusu Masakage: Control system of the Date clan's Sendai Castle. The family name can cause some confusion.^[1]
- Yoshihime: Masamune's mother. Half demonic long-lived and half human. Principal of Sendai Date Academy.

• Sviet Rus

- Marfa Boretskaya: Female mayor of the floating city Novgorod. An undead demon.
- Honjou Shigenaga: Brave general who defends Sviet Rus's lands. Uses the Honjou Shield.
- Toby: A mysterious old man from the Far East who now works for Marfa. Or maybe it isn't that much of a mystery.

• **Mogami Clan**

- Mogami Yoshiaki: Betrayal-loving daimyo known as the Fox of Ushuu. Shrewd leader who unified frigid Mogami in a single generation.
- Sakenobe: The Mouse that follows Yoshiaki-sama, mon!

• **Other**

- Sarutobi Sasuke: Sanada Academy Ten Braves #1. Uses martial arts and ninja techniques.
- Kirigakure Saizou: Sanada Academy Ten Braves #2. Uses a wind movement technique.
- Miyoshi Isa: Sanada Academy Ten Braves #4. AKA Isa Nyuudou. Girl who uses a remote-controlled god of war.
- Anayama Kosuke: Sanada Academy Ten Braves #5. Looks like a nice guy. Uses ninja techniques.
- Yuri Kamanosuke: Sanada Academy Ten Braves #6. Specializes in sword fighting.
- Nezu Jinpachi: Sanada Academy Ten Braves #8. Specializes in sniping.

words

- ・**教導院**: 学校施設のこと。実質上の政軍中心部。分校が多く存在する。
- ・**教譜**: 神や聖譜を信奏する組織。集団。
- ・**極東**: 重奏統合騒乱の後、神州をこう呼ぶ。
- ・**K.P.A.Italia**: 安芸諸国連合+イタリア都市連合のこと。
- ・**賢鉱石、賢水**: 流体を含んだ鉱石、水。流体燃料としても使用可能。
- ・**校則法**: 聖連が取り決めた教導院間の基本法。

さ行

- ・**暫定議会**: 武蔵において、生徒会や総長連合、委員会の官僚となる大人達の組織。
- ・**清らか大市【サンメルカド】**: 三征西班牙のブランド。
- ・**Shaja【シャージャ】**: ムラサイ圏における“了解”の意。本来は勇気を示す語の表音。
- ・**Jud.【ジャッジ/ジャッジメント】**: 咎人用の“応答”“了解”の意。
- ・**重奏世界**: かつて神州のコピーを置いた異空間のこと。地脈制御で保たれていた。
- ・**重奏統合争乱**: 重奏世界が崩壊した際に生じた重奏世界側住人と現実世界側(神州)住人の戦争。重奏世界側が勝利して神州は暫定支配を受ける。
- ・**重奏領域**: 落ちてきた重奏世界の神州が、碎けながら現実側に合一した箇所。
- ・**襲名**: 歴史再現のために適格者が歴史上の人物を襲名すること。
- ・**術式**: 流体を加工することで空間中に奇跡を起こすこと。
- ・**白砂台座**: 出雲産業座の神社系ブランド。
- ・**人工末世**: 英国の“花園”に末世研究用で作られた地脈の歪みの圧縮。
- ・**神格武装**: 通常の武装とは違い、特有の能力を持つ武装。
- ・**神州**: 極東のかつての呼び方。
- ・**清武田**: 中国と武田家の合一。
- ・**神道**: 極東の教譜。極東の神々を信奏し、神奏術を用いる。
- ・**上越露西亜【スヴィエートルーシ】**: 上杉家+露西亜のこと。
- ・**聖協**: 聖譜協奏派。上越露西亜で独自発展した旧派。
- ・**聖術**: Tsirhc系の術式。旧派は聖譜や聖者

あ行

- ・**黒金侍【アイゼンリッター】**: M.H.R.R.改派領邦の主企業。
- ・**ArchsArt**: “大属の芸術”。英国の主企業。
- ・**安土城**: P.A.Odaが有する巨大航空戦艦。
- ・**尼子家**: 元IZUMOの地。毛利と六護式仏蘭西によって滅亡。
- ・**有明**: 関東IZUMOによる武蔵専用浮きドック。
- ・**アルマダの海戦**: 英国と三征西班牙の間に生じた海戦。三征西班牙が英国上陸を画策したが壊滅する。
- ・**出雲産業座(IZUMO)**: 極東最大規模の企業座。極東の神社の総本山で武蔵の建造を担った企業。
- ・**英国【イングランド】**: 浮遊島を用いており、極東の土地や大名を支配していない。
- ・**ヴェストファーレン条約**: 三十年戦争などの講和条約。
- ・**H.R.R.M.**: “神聖騎士団鉄工会”。M.H.R.R.旧派領邦の主企業。
- ・**女神万歳【エウロパ】**: 六護式仏蘭西の主企業。
- ・**六護式仏蘭西【エグザゴンフランセーズ】**: 毛利家+フランスのこと。
- ・**王賜剣【エクスカリバー】**: 一型と二型がある。
- ・**ATELL**: 流体の最小単位。術式に使用する。
- ・**見下し魔山【エーデルブロッケン】**: 魔術ブランド。本社所在不明。
- ・**M.H.R.R.**: 羽柴家+神聖ローマ帝国のこと。
- ・**七部六仙道【オアト】**: 中国の仙道を基礎とした教譜。
- ・**奥州**: 東北地域のこと。東側を伊達家。西側を最上家が治める。
- ・**奥州藤原(平泉)**: 奥州の南側にある長寿族の隠れ里。
- ・**御館の乱【おたてのらん】**: 上杉家内における謙信死後の跡目相続争い。上杉・景勝と長尾・景虎が争い、景勝が勝利した。

か行

- ・**外燃拝気**: 自分の外に蓄積された拝気のこと。流体燃料などが該当。
- ・**旧派【カトリック】**: 古くから存在するTsirhcの主流。

words

・**ノヴゴロド**:露西亜の西端の大商業都市。浮上都市だが、雷帝イヴァン四世の大粛清で死者の都市となった。

は行

・**拝気**:人間が一時間存在するために必要な流体。3600ATELL。術式の消費ATELL換算単位。

・**花園**:英国にて作られた人工末世研究用の空間。

・**範鋼**:清のブランド。頑丈だけどやや荒い。

・**非衰退調律進行**:黎明の時代に起きた、聖譜や重奏世界を作った運動。

・**P.A.Oda**:織田家+オスマン。

・**表示枠**:各教譜の基本加護を使用するための術式デバイス。

・**改派【プロテスタント】**:旧派腐敗からの脱却と時代に合わせたTsirhcの新流。

・**機械仕掛けの明星【フィーノアルバ】**:K.P.A.Italiaのブランド。発条式を売り物とする。

・**武神**:人が同化して動く巨大な人型機械。

・**文禄の役**:羽柴の朝鮮侵攻。第一回目のこと。

・**奉納**:神に、神の喜ぶものや内燃拝気を納めること。献納。

ま行

・**走狗【マウス】**:神道教譜と奏者の仲介をする霊獣型デバイス。他教譜では走徒とも言う。

・**魔術**:欧州で絶賛迫害中の民間術式。

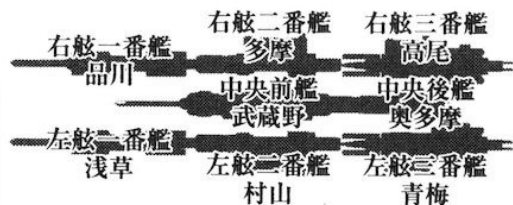
・**末世**:この世の終わり。聖譜の歴史記述が途切れる一六四八年のこと。

・**帝**:神格者、京にて神器による地脈制御を行っていると言われる。俗世に関与しない。

・**三河**:元信公の地脈炉暴走崩壊で消滅。

・**水戸**:奥州の南、江戸の北。ミツダイラの所領地。

・**武蔵**:航空都市艦。極東に許された唯一の独立領土。



関係、改派は聖譜のみから力を導く。

・**生徒会**:各教導院の内務、外務などを行う組織。

・**聖譜**:前地球時代の歴史を記した歴史書。七組+抄本がある。

・**聖譜記述**:聖譜の機能により、前地球時代の歴史が百年先まで自動更新される。が、一六四八年の記述を最後に更新が停止している。

・**聖譜顕装**:聖譜の持つ能力を転用するための武装。

・**精霊術**:意志を持った流体とも言える精霊に話し掛け、力を借りる原始的な術式。

・**聖連**:聖譜連盟。歴史再現を主導するための組織。

・**奏者**:各教譜の信徒。

・**総長連合**:総長を長に、各教導院の警備など、実働と指揮を行う組織。

・**卒業**:極東以外の国は無期限制限。極東は十八歳卒業制。

た行

・**代演**:術式発動に拝気を使用する代わりに、神の喜ぶものを奉納すること。

・**大罪武装**:人間の罪をモチーフに作られた大量破壊武装。

・**ダンハイ**:教譜の一つ。輪廻転生を主軸としている。

・**地脈**:空間を構成する流体の流れる経路の内、太いもの。

・**地脈炉**:地脈から流体を抽出精製する炉。地脈の変異を起こしやすく、爆発すると数キロ範囲が消滅して不安定化するためTsirhc教譜では禁止。

・**超祝福艦隊**:アルマダ海戦用の三征西班牙の艦隊。最新鋭艦で構成。

・**Tsirhc**:神の子を長に据えた教譜。聖譜を信奉する。

・**Tes.【テス/テストメント】**:“応答”“了解”の意。

・**通し道歌**:江戸時代に極東に発生する童謡の試作型。

・**三征西班牙【トレスエスパニア】**:大内、大友家+スペインのこと。ポルトガルも併合中。

な行

・**内燃拝気**:自分の中にため込んだ拝気のこと。

words

- ・武蔵アリアダスト学院:武蔵上、奥多摩に存在する極東の代表校。
- ・矛盾許容:この世界の基礎能。あらゆる物理法則の同時存在を叶える。
- ・ムラサイ:Tsirhcとは別に聖譜を信奏する後発派。

ら行

- ・流体:矛盾許容型の空間構成要素。
- ・流体燃料:燃料として精製された流体。外燃拌気や、流体駆動器に用いられる。
- ・流体駆動器:流体の空間変異力を用いた駆動器。効果は内部の紋章などによって変化する。
- ・流体炉:空間から流体を抽出精製する炉。地脈炉より出力は低いが比較的安全。
- ・竜脈炉:莫大量の流体を爆発させ、半径数キロを消滅させる爆弾。羽柴が有する。
- ・黎明の時代:聖譜成立以前の時代のこと。
- ・歴史再現:聖譜記述を人々が再現して世界の流れを保つこと。

A

- Academy: An educational facility. Used as the center of political and military power. Tend to have many branch schools.
- Academy Rules: The basic laws upheld between academies. Agreed to by the Testament Union.
- Age of Dawn: The age before the Testament was established.
- Amako clan: Former IZUMO land. Destroyed by Mouri and Hexagone Française.
- Anti-Decline Pro-Tuning: The action taken during the Age of Dawn that led to the creation of the Testament and Harmonic World.
- Apocalypse: The end of the world. 1648 when the Testament's history descriptions end.
- ArchsArt: England's primary corporation.
- Ariake: Floating dock for the Musashi provided by Kantou IZUMO.
- Armada battle: A naval battle fought between England and Tres España. Tres España planned to land on England but their fleet was destroyed.
- Artificial Apocalypse: A compressed ley line distortion created in England's Avalon to research the Apocalypse.
- ATELL: The smallest unit of ether. Used for spells.
- Avalon: A space created in England to research the artificial Apocalypse.
- Azuchi Castle: P.A. Oda's giant aerial warship.

B

- Blessings: The amount of ether needed for a human to exist for one hour. 3600 ATELL. Conversion unit for a spell's ATELL consumption.
- Bunroku Campaign: Hashiba's invasion of Korea. The first one.

C

- Catholic: The old mainstream version of Tsirhc.
- Contradiction Allowance: The foundational ability of the world. Allows the simultaneous existence of all sorts of physical laws.

D

- Divine States: Former name of the Far East.
- Divine Weapon: A weapon that, unlike a normal weapon, has a unique ability.
- Dragon Line Reactor: A bomb that uses a runaway ley line reactor to destroy a wide area.
- Dunhi: A religion. Focused on reincarnation.

E

- Edel Brocken: Magic brand. Location of headquarters unknown.
- Eisenritter: Primary corporation of M.H.R.R.'s Protestant principalities.
- Emperor: A divine individual who is said to control the ley lines using the Imperial Regalia in Kyou. Does not interfere with the world.
- England: Uses a floating island and does not control any Far Eastern land or Far Eastern daimyo.
- Ether: Component that makes up contradiction-allowing space.
- Ether Engine: An engine that uses ether's space-altering ability. The effect changes based on the internal crest.
- Ether Fuel: Ether that has been purified into fuel. Used as External Blessings or for

ether engines.

- Ether Reactor: A reactor that extracts and purifies ether from the air. Has a lower output than a ley line reactor, but is relatively safe.
- Europa: Hexagone Française's primary corporation.
- Excalibur: Has a first and second version.
- External Blessings: Blessings accumulated outside of oneself. Ether fuel is an example.

F

- Fan Gang: Qing brand. Durable but a bit rough.
- Far East: Name of the Divine States after the Harmonic Unification War.
- Fino Alba: K.P.A. Italian brand. Their use of springs is their selling point.

G

- God of War: A giant humanoid machine that people combine with to move.
- Graduation: No limit for nations other than the Far East. Far Easterners must graduate at 18.
- Grande y Felicísima Armada: Tres España's fleet for the Armada battle. Made up of cutting-edge ships.

H

- Harmonic Territory: Locations where the fallen Harmonic World Divine States unified with the real world while breaking apart.
- Harmonic Unification War: A war between the harmonic world residents and the real world (Divine States) residents after the destruction of the harmonic world. The harmonic world residents won and began a provisional rule over the Divine States.
- Harmonic World: A former alternate space that copied the Divine States. Preserved through ley line control.
- Hexagone Française: Mouri clan + France.
- History Recreation: Recreating the Testament descriptions to maintain the path the world takes.
- Holy Spells: Tsirhc spells. The Catholics are related to the Testament and holy individuals while the Protestants derive power only from the Testament.
- H.R.R.M.: Holy Knights Ironworks Guild. Primary corporation of M.H.R.R.'s Catholic principalities.

I

- Inherited Name: The name of a historical figure given to an appropriate individual for the history recreation.
- Internal Blessings: blessings stored within oneself.
- IZUMO: The Far East's largest corporation. The headquarters for Far Eastern shrines and the corporation that built the Musashi.

J

- Judge/Judgment: Means "understood". Used by criminals.

K

- K.P.A. Italia: Association of Aki States + Union of Italian City States.

L

- Ley Line: The thicker of the pathways through which ether flows.
- Ley Line Reactor: A reactor that extracts and refines ether from ley lines. Can easily cause ley line mutations and destroy everything within several kilometers if they explode. Due to their instability, they are banned by the Tsirhc religion.
- Logismo Oplo: Weapons of mass destruction created on the motif of the seven deadly sins.

M

- Magic: Folk spells currently under persecution in Europe.
- M.H.R.R.: Hashiba clan + Holy Roman Empires.
- Mikawa: Destroyed by the collapse of Lord Motonobu's ley line reactor.
- Mlasi: A later non-Tsirhc religion that also worships the Testament.
- Mouse: A spirit beast device to act as an intermediary between the Shinto religion and its musicians. Other religions use different names.
- Musashi: Aerial city ship. The sole independent territory allowed for the Far East.

[First Starboard Ship – Shinagawa/Second Starboard Ship – Tama/Third Starboard Ship – Takao/First Central Ship – Musashino/Back Central Ship – Okutama/First Port Ship – Asakusa/Second Port Ship – Murayama/Third Port Ship – Oume]

- Musashi Ariadust Academy: The Far East's representative academy which exists on Okutama of Musashi.
- Musician: A religion's worshiper.

N

- Novgorod: A large trade city on the western end of Russia. It is a floating city, but became a city of the dead after Ivan IV the Terrible's purge.

O

- Oat: A religion based on China's sages.
- Offering: Providing a god with something they will enjoy or Internal Blessings.
- Orei Metallo/Nero: Ore or water containing ether. Can be used as ether fuel.
- Orthodox: The Orthodox Concerto religion. Sviet Rus's unique branch of Catholicism.
- Oushuu: The Tohoku region. The Date clan rules the east and the Mogami clan rules the west.
- Oushuu Fujiwara (Hiraizumi): A hidden village of the long-lived in southern Oushuu.

P

- P.A. Oda: Oda clan + Ottomans.
- Peace of Westphalia: The peace treaty that ended the Thirty Years' War.
- Protestant: A new style of Tsihrhc created to escape the corruption of Catholicism and to adjust to the new age.
- Provisional Council: Group of adults who act as bureaucrats toward Musashi's student council, chancellor's officers, and student committees.

Q

- Qing-Takeda: Combination of China and the Takeda clan.

R

- Religion: Organizations or groups that worship a god or the Testament.

S

- San Mercado: Tres Españan brand.
- Shaja: Used in Mlasi regions and means “understood”. Originally meant “courage”.
- Shinto: Far Eastern religion. Worships the Far Eastern gods and uses divine music spells.
- Shirasago Enterprises: IZUMO’s shrine brand.
- Siege of Otate: Conflict over the succession of the Uesugi clan after Kenshin’s death. Uesugi Kagekatsu and Nagao Kagetora fought and Kagekatsu won.
- Sign Frame: Spell device needed to use each religion’s basic protection.
- Song of Passage: Prototype of a fairy tale created in the Far East during the Edo period.
- Spell: Causing a miracle in a certain space by processing ether.
- Spirit Spell: Primitive spells used by talking to and borrowing the power of spirits, which are ether with a will of its own.
- Student Council: The organization that handles an academy’s domestic and foreign affairs.
- Substitution: Offering something to please a god instead of using Blessings to activate

- a spell.
- Sviet Rus: Uesugi clan + Russia.

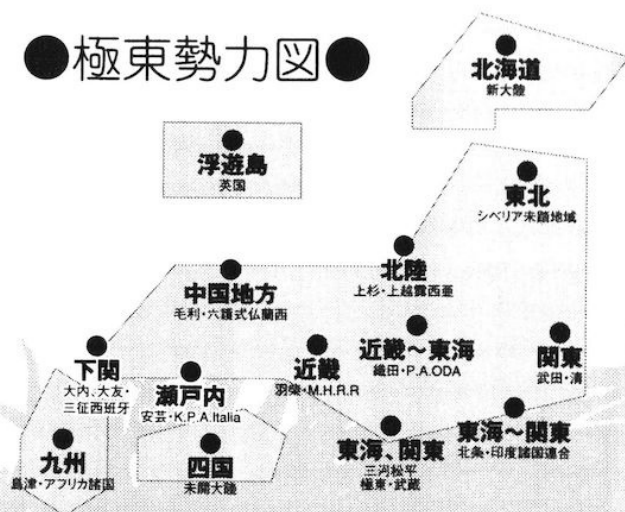
T

- Tes/Testament: Means “understood”.
- Testament: A history book that provides the history of the earth’s previous age. There are seven pairs and excerpts.
- Testament Descriptions: History of the earth’s previous age that is automatically updated by the Testament. However, it stopped updating after the description for 1648.
- Testament Union: An organization meant to lead the history recreation.
- Testamenta Arma: Weapons that use the ability of the Testaments.
- Tres España: Oouchi and Ootomo clans + Spain. Currently includes Portugal.
- Tsrhc: A religion which places the Son of God at the top. Worships the Testament.

●チャット 実況通神呼び名一覧●

- ・あずま：東
- ・あさま：浅間・智
- ・いんび：伊藤・健児（イトケン）
- ・俺：葵・トーリ
- ・金マル：マルゴット・ナイト
- ・義：里見・義康
- ・傷有り：メアリ・スチュアート
- ・銀狼：ネイト・ミトツダイラ
- ・現役娘：人狼女王
- ・賢姉様：葵・喜美
- ・481：三科・翔一
- ・立花夫：立花・宗茂
- ・立花嫁：立花・闇
- ・煙草女：直政
- ・十Z0：点蔵・クロスユナイト
- ・蜻蛉切：本多・二代
- ・粘着王：ネンジ
- ・83：ハッサン・フルブシ
- ・貧従士：アデーレ・バルフェット
- ・副会長：本多・正純
- ・ベル：向井・鈴
- ・ホラ子：ホライゾン・アリアダスト
- ・●画：マルガ・ナルゼ
- ・○ペ屋：ハイディ・オーゲザヴァラー
- ・847：三科・大
- ・未熟者：トゥーサン・ネシンバラ
- ・武蔵王：ヨシナオ
- ・眼鏡：シェイクスピア
- ・礼賛者：御広敷・銀二
- ・労働者：ノリキ
- ・不退転：伊達・成実
- ・景綱君：片倉・小十郎
- ・牙：鬼庭・綱元
- ・留守居：留守・政景
- ・三立申：滝川・一益

●極東勢力図●



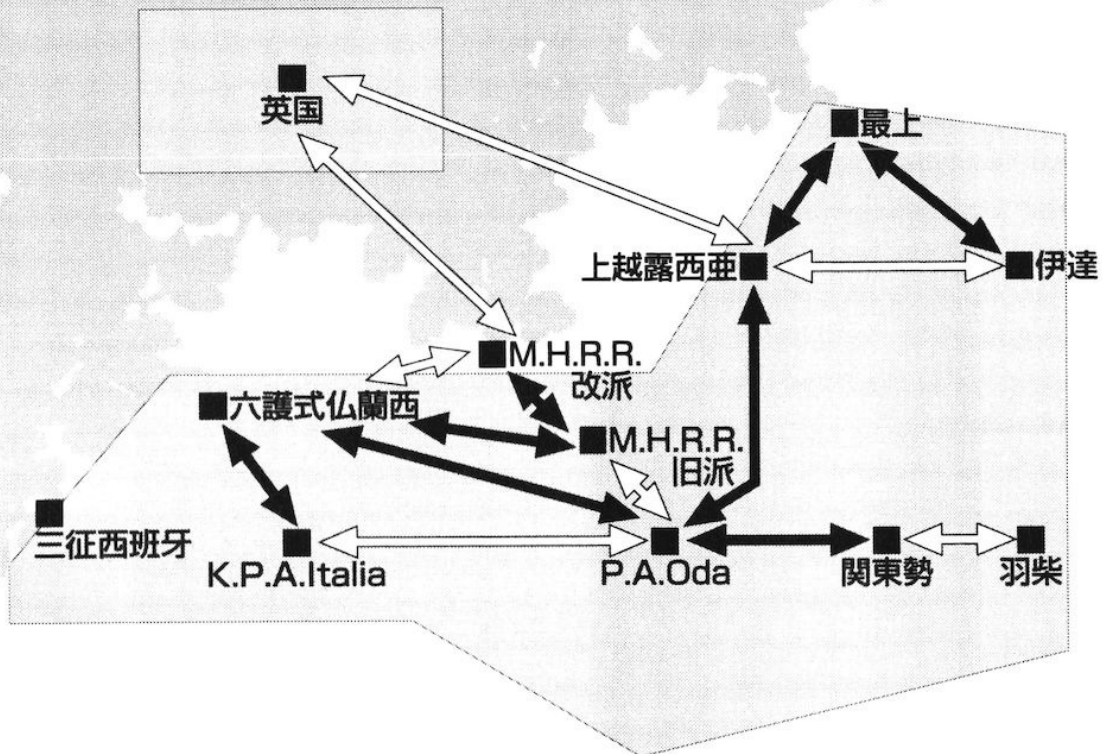
4<上>の 簡易あらすじ

敗戦の後、有明で改修を行う武蔵に、伊達家からの使者として伊達・成実が来訪。拒絶一択だったが姉好き半竜の不規則発言で伊達、最上、上越露西亞との三国へと外交官派遣となる。が、一方でP.A.Odaは上越露西亞に侵攻、バーサーカー大活躍で西端の浮上都市ノヴゴロドと協働し、更には武蔵に嫌がらせで十本槍の二人、福島と加藤が攻撃を仕掛けてきたので御座るよ。



world

●勢力関係図●



■極東（武蔵）

- 三征西班牙
- K.P.A. Italia
- 英国
- M.H.R.R. 改派
- M.H.R.R. 旧派
- 六護式仏蘭西
- P.A. Oda
- 関東勢

⇄ 協働
→ 敵対

無矢印は放置
または緩い警戒

●今後の武蔵の予定●



「姉ちゃん! 姉ちゃん! 武蔵はこれからどういう新感覚になっていくんだよ!？」



「フフ、武蔵は力がないと思われて、奥州勢や上越露西亜が羽柴になびき始めたから、改修を急ぎつつ、伊達、最上、上越露西亜への三国に外交官を派遣したのね。会議でも出来て味方につけられたらいいわねえ」

Simple Summary of 4-A:

After their defeat, Musashi is being remodeled in the Ariake when Date Narumi visits as an envoy from the Date clan. She was intent on rejecting them, but an irregular statement from the elder sister loving half-dragon led to diplomats being sent to Date, Mogami, and Sviet Rus. Meanwhile, P.A. Oda invaded Sviet Rus and gained the cooperation of the western floating city of Novgorod thanks to the efforts of their berserker. And in order to harass Musashi, they sent Fukushima and Katou, two of their Ten Spears, in to attack.

Divine Chat Screenname List:

- Azuma: Azuma
- Asama: Asama Tomo
- Obscene: Itou Kenji (Itoken)
- Me: Aoi Toori
- Gold Mar: Margot Naito
- Righteousness: Satomi Yoshiyasu
- Scarred: Mary Stuart
- Silver Wolf: Nate Mitosudaira
- Still Got It: Reine des Garous
- Wise Sister: Aoi Kimi
- 481: Mishina Shouichi
- Tachibana Husband: Tachibana Muneshige
- Tachibana Wife: Tachibana Gin
- Smoking Girl: Naomasa
- 10ZO: Tenzou Crossunite
- Tonbokiri: Honda Futayo
- Sticky King: Nenji
- 83: Hassan Furubushi
- Flat Vassal: Adele Balfette
- Vice President: Honda Masazumi
- Bell: Mukai Suzu
- Hori-ko: Horizon Ariadust
- Mal-Ga: Malga Naruze
- Marube-ya: Heidi Augesvarer
- 847: Mishina Hiro
- Novice: Toussaint Neshinbara
- Musashi King: Yoshinao
- Four Eyes: Shakespeare
- Worshipper: Ohiroshiki Ginji
- Laborer: Noriki

- Unturning: Date Narumi
- Kagetsuna-kun: Katakura Kojuurou
- Fang: Oniniwa Tsunamoto
- Caretaker: Rusu Makikage
- Taki: Takigawa Ichimasu

Far Eastern Powers:

[Same map as in 3-A.]

Relationships Between the Major Powers:

[Same as 4-A]

Musashi's Plans:

Toori: Sis! Sis! What kind of new things will the Musashi be doing now!?

Kimi: Heh heh. The Oushuu forces and Sviet Rus are obeying Hashiba because they think the Musashi is powerless, so we're hurrying through our remodeling while sending diplomats out to Date, Mogami, and Sviet Rus. It would be great if we could speak with them and make some allies.

School Rules

Article 347

- Responsibility from matters predating the Testament cannot be opposed.

Chapter 31: The Pair on Twin Walls

第三十一章

『双璧の二対』



行って戻って
行っても動せず
配点 (立ち位置)

You go and return

You go without moving

Point Allocation (Position)

Below the Mito sky, Futayo's battle with Fukushima Masanori reached its conclusion.

There was a single reason for this: the Tonbo Spare had not activated.

...I just can't do it!

It had not before either. The spare supposedly had the same thoughts as Tonbokiri, yet it would not lend her its power. She did not know why because it was maintaining its silence.

"Not knowing" succinctly summed up the situation that Futayo faced.

She felt no hint of activation, only the chill and weight of a hunk of metal in her hands.

She did not understand why the Tonbo Spare would not obey her.

And that lack of understanding led her to a single conclusion: she was not good enough.

Meanwhile, her enemy's attack did work. The tip of Fuksuhima's spear split in half and the flat-looking surface opened before Futayo's eyes.

...This is dangerous!

Futayo immediately decided to twist her feet and forcibly activate Soaring Wings.

"Go!"

She was directing herself in an impossible direction, which would provide a certain result.

...I'll be blown away by the recoil!!

That was exactly what happened. Instead of moving in the direction of her acceleration, she was deflected like a ricocheting bullet and kicked into the air by her own acceleration spell.

"———!!"

She smashed through the roof of a private home several dozen meters away and collided with

a wooden container storehouse.

“Futayo!!”

Masazumi watched as Futayo was launched through the air.

The girl flew behind a nearby home’s roof, but before Masazumi could turn that way...

...*Wah.*

She suspected it was a wooden box structure based on the crashing sound, and then the wooden pieces were blasted into the air like a crashing wave.

But among the sounds of broken and creaking wood, someone approached in the span of a breath: Fukushima Masanori.

She used her acceleration spell to fall toward Masazumi using the roofs on either side of the alleyway.

Her face was downcast, but Masazumi could tell her teeth were tightly clenched. Almost as if...

...*That wasn’t what she wanted?*

Masazumi could only think Futayo had self-destructed, but Fukushima must have had her own thoughts on that matter.

Fukushima quickly approached. She placed the tip of her spear along her straight line of acceleration and arrived within fifty meters in the span of a breath.

As soon as Masazumi realized how fast she was, light appeared in the exposed interior of the spear named Ichinotani.

...*It can shoot!?*

Masazumi sensed danger, but Asama was the one to react.

“It’s weak, but that light is a real dragon cannon! It isn’t an artificial one produced by a weapon!”

She raised her eyebrows as she hurriedly prepared a defensive spell with a charm.

“Why is a human weapon firing a dragon’s attack!?”

No one could answer that as the glowing attack was fired their way from Fukushima's spear.

Masazumi thought it was going to be a direct hit, but a different blast of light appeared far down the road.

Kiyomasa had fired her glowing blade toward Mitotsudaira on top of the bisected transport ship sliding down the road.

Ten Spears #2 Katou Kiyomasa fired while performing a side flip. The blade of light tore into the starboard side deck and accurately swept through the position of the silver hair.

"Did I hit her!?"

Kiyomasa's blonde hair fluttered in the air as she landed from her side flip. She turned to stern to check on Caledfwlch's results.

...!?

She saw a shadow from overhead and sensed a presence falling without resistance, so...

...*Dodge!*

She leaped left, toward the outside of the ship.

Something fell in the position she had just vacated: Caledfwlch's right spear. She had let go of that one to use it as footing for her side flip.

Why is that there? she wondered as the spear stabbed into the deck and shook.

If it had been a mere stone or piece of rubble, she would have ignored it, but the weapon she herself had let go of had fallen and stabbed into her previous position. It naturally caught her attention.

And that created a brief moment of inattention.

Something used that moment to charge in from the stern.

It was a silver wind.

The silver wolf used the ship's long deck for a long starting run of repeated bursts of movement.

...*She escaped that previous blast unharmed!?*

Kiyomasa understood what had happened.

The silver wolf had chosen a certain hiding spot: the split down the center of the sliding ship.

She had used a burst of her full strength to drop down but had not immediately jumped back up. She would have been hit by Kiyomasa's attack if she had.

That had to have been the silver wolf's decision. She had remained below and circled to the back of the quickly sliding ship.

"And then used the length of the deck to reach her top speed!"

It was a ridiculous decision. If she had simply remained on the ground, Kiyomasa would have been taken away with the ship.

But that was not what a wolf did. A wolf protected her territory until the enemy had been completely driven out.

So she was approaching. The color silver raced in a straight line with no feints.

She was fast. The sound of her footsteps arrived only after she did. An afterimage formed one step behind her.

"Rrraahh!!"

She roared and deepened her landing and attack stance, but Kiyomasa also took action.

The right Caledfwlch had yet to release its power, so she forcibly pulled it from the deck and aimed it toward the silver wolf.

"Finish this, Caledfwlch!!"

The blast was fired horizontally from the tip of the blade.

The Mito residents who had stepped outside to watch the battle's progress saw what happened next.

Caledfwlch's light was fired from the sliding transport ship, so their lord did something with Excalibur.

"She...threw it?"

They had not been able to see it. Their eyes had only been able to capture their lord making

the throwing motion.

What happened afterwards was too fast to see, but as she continued running...

“...!?”

The light exploded.

Something flew into the beam of light and split it into two blasts of spray.

It was Ex. Collbrande. That sword of English royalty cut apart the destructive light with sounds of scraping and splitting.

“Hit!”

It continued toward the enemy who wielded the light cannon spear. Excalibur flew toward the weapon itself.

Kiyomasa made a split second decision.

She had no reason to take the blow from Excalibur since she was in the middle of firing. So...

“Below!”

As if to restrain Caledfwlch, she lowered her hips. If she placed her knee down in a kneeling position, Excalibur would pass over her head.

...And my attack will hit her from below!

She was aiming for a winding hit to the knees.

A weapon was not the only frightening attack at a werewolf's disposal. A jab with their claws or a punch was harder to see coming, so this girl would be more dangerous up close. That was why Kiyomasa targeted her legs.

“Here she comes!”

The enemy made a leap.

It was a low but quick leap meant to slip above the cannon blast.

With the beam of light below, making a kick would be no easy task. And with Kiyomasa on

her knee, a claw attack from above would also be difficult.

All Kiyomasa needed to do was make a counterattack with her left spear. To do that, she held the left Caledfwlch forward in order to slam the tip against the leaping silver wolf. But...

“————!?”

Kiyomasa saw light reflected off of the left Caledfwlch.

Her immediate decision protected her. She kept one heel raised and laid her upper body down forward. Her blonde hair swung forward, and...

“Behind me!?”

Ex. Collbrande flew overhead from behind.

She did not even bother asking why. The answer was a silver chain. A chain had been laid out in a wide enough circle that she had not sensed its presence. Then, it had caught Ex. Collbrande and thrown it back to its master.

Up ahead, the silver wolf bent backwards with Ex. Collbrande already in her hands.

“Rrahh!!”

Her body sprang back from its backwards lean for an overhead attack in midair.

There was no hesitation in the attack. Block it and be broken. Touch it and be sliced. It was that sort of blow.

Kiyomasa lowered her body as much as possible. Her upper body was lowered, so she could not evade to the left, to the right, or backwards. And she could not make a counterattack with her weapon held so low.

So she decided to push with her raised heel.

“Oh!”

She moved her lowered body forward.

Two movements occurred at the same moment.

First, Kiyomasa leaped forward to slip below Mitotsudaira’s attack.

Second...

“Toh.”

Mitotsudaira suddenly let go of Ex. Collbrande and threw it diagonally upwards.

She did not even look to the royal sword as it audibly cut through the air because she was busy with something else. She took advantage of the very slight opportunity before her.

“Please forgive me.”

She dropped her right foot as if to pin Kiyomasa to the deck.

Kiyomasa slammed loudly against the deck.

As if being rewarded, the silver-haired wolf leaped straight up toward the heavens.

However, Kiyomasa endured the attack that knocked her face-down into the deck. She raised the arms holding the two halves of Caledfwlch and she tried to swing them up toward the silver wolf.

“So that’s what you were doing!?”

Before she had even finished shouting, Kiyomasa was launched into the air. She had not been hit by any kind of attack.

It was the deck.

The wreckage of the transport ship had reached the end of the gouge in the road and had been forcefully knocked upwards.

The hopping bow and the ship itself launched Kiyomasa because she had been pushed back toward the bow.

With a spectacular noise, the transport ship stood vertically in the center of the town. The trembling, fifty-meter ship hopped up in its bisected state.

It whipped up the wind, scattered wreckage and rubble, rose like a koi climbing a waterfall, and for just a moment floated in midair while split between north and south.

As the ship hung in the air, two figures alighted on its nose.

One was Kiyomasa who released light from the bottom of her right spear to forcibly land on

the southern wreckage's bow.

The other was Mitotsudaira who spread her arms in midair, rapidly spun her body, and landed on the northern wreckage's bow.

The two of them waited until just before the stern of the floating ship crashed into the ground.

“—————!”

Mitotsudaira launched an attack.

Her silver chain held Excalibur as she threw it like the hammer throw

“Take this!!”

She used all of her strength, gave her entire body a burst of speed, and increased the inertial force by pulling back on the chain. An explosion of water vapor surrounded Excalibur as it flew horizontally through the air.

A moment later, her attack collided with Kiyomasa.

Without even listening to the intense sound, Mitotsudaira turned her head west in search of someone.

“My king!!”

Mitotsudaira saw her king. Fukushima Masanori had launched an attack in that direction.

What was she supposed to do now that Futayo could no longer fight?

She looked his way from the ship that was about to land, but...

...*Light!*?

Fragments of light scattered through the sky. Someone had deflected Fukushima's dragon cannon. It was...

“My king!!”

The nudist had blocked Fukushima's attack.

Chapter 32: Visitor from Above

第三十二章

『上からの参観者』



どうしてここに
いつから見ていて
これから何処に
配点（気遣い）

Why are you here?

How long have you been watching?

Where are you going next?

Point Allocation (Concern)

Just as Masazumi thought Fukushima's dragon cannon was going to hit them, she saw a form of defense she had never seen before.

...Eh?

The naked idiot walked up from behind with the Logismo Oplo shield hanging from his crotch.

It was a direct hit.

There was a scorching sound and light scattered, but the idiot stuck his chest out proudly and looked to Fukushima.

"Ha ha ha! You're so dumb. Like that's going to work on my greedy crotch!"

"Ah, Toori-kun! That's a real dragon cannon, so it'll get stronger with the last breath!"

After escaping to the side, Masazumi watched the idiot get blown away by the more powerful second half, rotate five times, and get kicked back down to the ground by Horizon who was standing along his path.

"Are you okay, Toori-sama!? I'm making an outward display of being worried for you."

"Um, I'm pretty sure that last hit was worst one! Wasn't it!?"

Probably, thought Masazumi as black hair danced before her eyes. It was Asama who had moved over to protect her before turning back toward Aoi and the others.

"Kimi!"

A solid sound immediately followed her shout.

Fukushima had charged in after the cannon blast, but she had been deflected and sent back into the air.

Someone had protected Viceroy Nudist and Vicereine Horizon.

“Heh heh. Did you really think that was enough to reach the summit’s flower?”

The Aoi Sister stood calmly in the center of the road.

Kimi looked to her opponent, Fukushima, who was landing on a rooftop to the southwest.

The girl raised her spear and asked Kimi a question.

“What was that technique?”

Kimi smiled and gently embraced her own body. She raised her breasts and rested her chin on them.

“Heh... It was the Giant Breasts Defense.”

Fukushima looked at Kimi. First at her breasts, then at her face.

“D-do not lie to me!”

“Heh heh heh. You’re shaken, aren’t you!? But! If you doubt me, then explain just why I am unharmed! Use the phrase ‘giant breasts’ and keep it within ten words! Begin!!”

“I guess Giant Breasts Defense is as good as anything.”

Then the nudist shield rolled over.

“Sis! Sis! What about for a guy!? Is there a Two-Swords Style or an Iai Style!?”

“Toori-sama, I believe you first need to temper it by grabbing it with some pliers and hitting it with a hammer.”

“Y-you really like scaring nudists like me, don’t you!?”

How am I supposed to react to this? wondered Fukushima as she looked down at her own chest.

I have a fair bit there, she thought just as a voice reached her.

“You would need a little more than that. But in that case, you just need to sign a premium

contract (requires an extra monthly offering) with the Asama Shrine.”

Fukushima glanced over to the shrine maiden who waved her hands back and forth.

...Is that true or not?

Meanwhile, a great rumbling reached them from down the wide road to the east.

The transport ship had stood up and landed. Then an attack was made between the Mito Lord and Kiyomasa.

That attack would settle their battle.

After confirming her king's safety, Mitotsudaira looked back to her opponent eight meters ahead.

The ship was landing and its metal was creaking. The components and materials that had survived this long were finally breaking and their fragments spilled out from the ship. The force of Mitotsudaira's attack striking Kiyomasa crushed the air and created a second explosion of water vapor. She could feel it land through the silver chain.

...That was enough! It broke!!

Kiyomasa had used the left Caledfwlch as a shield and its shaft was breaking. Most of the armor Mitotsudaira could see was also shattering from right to left. But...

“She can still move!?”

Kiyomasa used her unharmed right arm to point the right Caledfwlch toward Mitotsudaira.

Half her face was stained with blood and both her left arm and its broken Caledfwlch hung unmoving by her side. But when Mitotsudaira checked the scattering armor fragments, she realized something.

Fragments of ether light were scattering from the inner surface of that broken armor.

“Reactive armor!?”

Me: “Self-stripping clothes!? Where do I get me some of that!?”

Shut up, my king.

Regardless, it was clear the enemy had opted to purge her armor when Excalibur hit. An arm

and a Caledfwlch had not been enough to stop the blow, so she had purged all of the armor to allow the force to safely escape. And...

...She just had to bear with the rest!

It was a matter of willpower. There was strength in the enemy's eyes and her stance was focused on aiming her right Caledfwlch to attack. She had chosen victory and had stripped away all else.

Well done, thought Mitotsudaira somewhere in her heart. *I don't know if this is bushido or chivalry, but she is definitely here to fight and to win.*

The enemy aimed straight for Mitotsudaira's chest with a horizontal blast from the right Caledfwlch.

"Kh."

Mitotsudaira spun Excalibur around at the far end of the silver chain. She spun herself around too. She could not pull the chain all the way back, so the center of gravity was poor. That meant she had no way of attacking, but...

"...!"

She did not give up. She was the first knight of a powerless king and her heart held unmatched pride in that fact. That relationship bound her to her king and she had no intention of throwing that away. *In that case*, she decided. *I need to evade and attack from this position.*

She had a few ways of doing so, but...

...I need to carefully observe Caledfwlch and charge in.

Kiyomasa was looking her way. With her face half-bloodied, she smelled of blood. Mitotsudaira only had to follow that bloody scent and attack there. *I could do that with my eyes closed*, she thought.

"Rrr..."

A growling laugh escaped on her breath and Kiyomasa's expression changed.

Oh? thought Mitotsudaira as she looked to Kiyomasa's face. *I'm enjoying this opportunity to demonstrate myself to my king, but why do you look so grim?*

But a moment later, her opportunity arrived. Caledfwlch's blade emitted bright light in the center of her vision.

I have to go for it, she thought.

In that instant, a busty blonde fell in front of her eyes.

“Oh, dear. Are you okay, Lady Mitotsudaira? It looks like you’re a little hurt.”

It was Mary.

Mitotsudaira saw Mary place a surprised hand on her cheek. She looked to Mitotsudaira’s arm without noticing Kiyomasa behind her.

“Oh, my. You’re bleeding. I need to heal you.”

Mary must have thought her Ex. Collbrande was in the way.

“Please stay put for a moment.”

She stabbed it behind her into the bisected ship’s bow. As soon as she faced Mitotsudaira again, Caledfwlch’s attack struck Ex. Collbrande and exploded to the left and right.

It only lasted an instant, but Mary must have seen the light passing by on either side.

“Oh?”

She looked both ways in confusion but of course saw nothing. Just to be sure, she checked under her arms and bent her knees inward to check behind them, but there was of course nothing there either. That may have been why she smiled.

“I must have been imagining things. Sorry, Lady Mitotsudaira. I’ll heal you right away.”

“Mary! Behind you! Behind you!”

“Eh?” Mary looked back and saw Katou Kiyomasa there. “Oh, my! Are you okay!? You’re so badly hurt! Who did this to you!?”

Mitotsudaira hung her head when she saw Kiyomasa spread her mouth horizontally and stop moving.

Mitotsudaira decided to tap Mary’s shoulder and ask what she could.

“Why are you here?”

“Judge.” Mary nodded while clearly concerned about Kiyomasa. “Um, inside the Ariake, they were having a revival sale at the shopping district in a newly completed surface area, so Master Tenzou suggested we treat ourselves to some nice things. While we were choosing some clothes, Ex. Collbrande quickly flew off, so I assumed you were having some fun again. I was curious and tried to get a look from the Ariake’s side terrace, but I couldn’t with the stealth, you know? So when I asked Master Tenzou if we could go take a look, he said we could. Yes, I grabbed his hand and jumped down using a spirit spell. We floated down slowly like before.”

Mitotsudaira thought she was slowly going insane. She was a little worried by how often phrases like “I should have known!” and “I knew it!” came to mind. Mary was generally fairly normal, but...

...Now that I think about it, she is that English Queen’s sister.

She also wondered which of the sisters had caused more trouble for the other.

At the same time, she realized the 1st Special Duty Officer had to be here too.

“_____”

She glanced toward her king and the others and spotted a summer uniform made into a ninja outfit.

Silver Wolf: “1st Special Duty Officer, you must be pretty reckless to jump down with her like that.”

10ZO: “Well, there were no footholds this time, so I was entirely reliant on Mary-dono.”

Scarred: “Master Tenzou held me very tightly, but that fueled the spirits with the emotion of joy and made it easier to control our descent.”

Asama: “Such passion! It’s been a while since we got a blast of heat that rivals the early summer weather!”

Wise Sister: “Yes. With the two of them there, they might not even need a heater in that frigid land. Oh, what’s this, Flat Politician? You’re planning to balance it out with some icy jokes, aren’t you!?”

Vice President: “Just get to safety already! Crossunite, we need to hurry to the land port! You all need to get to Sviet Rus! The rest of us will check if the three nations are on their way!”

Masazumi’s words meant the battle was already coming to a close.

Mitotsudaira saw Fukushima facing her king, but the girl looked over to Kiyomasa and raised a hand.

That must have signaled a withdrawal because she bowed quickly toward Masazumi and the others before facing south and...

...She vanished?

No, she was probably only moving very quickly. Her king and the others were apparently continuing on ahead to the land port containing the diplomatic ship that would take them to Sviet Rus. That meant she could let the 1st Special Duty Officer handle them.

“Um, uh, Mary?”

“Oh, Judge. I’m a little confused, so could you tell me what’s happening here, Lady Mitotsudaira?”

This is awkward, thought Mitotsudaira before answering.

“Y-yes. Um, Mary...I’m currently fighting a battle.”

“Oh, my! A battle? With who?”

Mary turned around to look at Kiyomasa.

“Oh, my! You were an enemy?”

Mitotsudaira had never felt more pity for an enemy.

Mary was not sure what to do.

There was an enemy in front of her. She had Excalibur, so she could fight if necessary. But was this an official duel? Had she gotten in the way when Mitotsudaira was on the verge of winning?

...Yes, back when she was fighting Rudolf II, Master Tenzou did say she has a strange habit of climbing somewhere high at the climax of her battles.

With Rudolf II, Mary had seen Mitotsudaira run down the metal tower while singing a howling song. And in London, she had a feeling Mitotsudaira had been singing while raised by the silver chains. If she was on top of the ship now, then it did indeed seem to be a habit. The odds were good Mary had interrupted Mitotsudaira’s victory.

What should I do? she thought.

...I wasn't paying enough attention...

She could only describe the situation as troublesome, but she also thought the enemy would have difficulty continuing the fight with her injuries. *In that case*, she thought before asking the enemy a question.

“Um, uh... What is your name?”

As Mitotsudaira wondered what was about to happen, she turned her gaze toward Kiyomasa.

“I suppose I can't hope for anything more than this.”

Kiyomasa briefly lowered her half-bloodied face and nodded.

She breathed in, brought her expression under control, raised her eyebrows a little, and wiped off the blood.

“I am Katou Kiyomasa, a second year of M.H.R.R.'s A.H.R.S. I am under Hashiba-sama's direct command.”

“Thank you very much. I am Mary Stuart of the Far East's Musashi Ariadust Academy. I am an aide to the 1st Special Duty Officer.”

Mary tilted her head.

“Now, about this battle. Why are you fighting?”

“T-to make an appearance as a warning.”

“Um, then if you've made your warning, can't you leave now?”

...That's a surprisingly good argument!

This girl is amazing, she thought while recalling that she thought the same thing in that Hexagone Française forest. She could imagine the look on Kiyomasa's face, but she could not bear to actually look at it.

Meanwhile, Mary placed a hand on her cheek.

“I don't know if you subscribe to the codes of bushido, chivalry, or whatever else, but we are trying to get back on our feet right now.”

“Th-that is why we are warning you. And attacking you now is the standard during the current age of war.”

“Judge.” Mary nodded. “So you think an imperfect opponent can fulfill the history recreation?”

Mary was not trying to admonish the girl. She was simply conveying the thoughts in her heart.

“I am aware Lady Hashiba is using the history recreation as the basis of her actions. She must unify the Far East and even reach for foreign nations, but she cannot do so in a violent way. If she does, her recreation may indeed act as a proper substitution for the Far East’s true history, but I doubt it will be judged the right thing to do.”

“And if she decides that foolish choice is the best possible decision regardless of how people judge her?”

Kiyomasa’s question brought a question to Mary’s mind, so she asked about it.

“Are you Lady Hashiba?”

Mary was relieved to see that Kiyomasa was dumbfounded, but not because this meant Hashiba and Kiyomasa were two different people.

...She is not dependent on Lady Hashiba.

In that case, thought Mary. She does not need to be trapped by that foolish choice of the history recreation.

“Even if your ruler believes that foolish choice is the best possible decision...that is not the same thing as her comrades and subordinates forcing their own foolish choices onto her.”

Mary suddenly realized something.

“Lady Mitotsudaira. ...You were going to win this battle, weren’t you? I apologize for interrupting.”

“Eh?” said Kiyomasa, but she heard no confusion from behind. Mitotsudaira understood.

...Hers and Master Tenzou’s king has made the best possible yet foolish choice of making things easier for everyone else by taking on their difficulties and impossibilities.

But, she thought.

“Lady Mitotsudaira and the others are doing their best to keep their king from making that foolish choice.”

Mitotsudaira brushed up her hair with a somewhat ticklish feeling in her heart.

She could only hope Mary’s words had not reached her king, Kimi, and the others.

She checked the divine transmission settings and saw they had all disconnected themselves from the network. The 1st Special Duty Officer had likely had them set up a local network in case there was another group of enemies.

Then I guess this is fine, she told herself.

“As a knight who serves her king, it is my chivalrous duty to protect my king without dishonoring him and to work toward what he desires. And the undeserved reward my king gives me to confirm the trust between us is the love between a king and his knight. That is the end result of chivalry and something only I can receive.”

This embarrassed her, but did that mean she was not yet a true knight? Still, she did not reject what he gave her and she did not hesitate to desire it. Of course, it was up to them whether any troubles would crop up in the trust between her and her king.

“So my current resolution is to offer myself in body and soul as my king’s knight.”

She puffed her chest out proudly, but...

Still Got It: “Well said! I would expect no less from our daughter! All that remains is to lie in wait for each other and begin some close-quarters combat like we did! ...Oh, but make sure the battle is consensual.”

...Why did the worst person of all have to overhear that!?

She repeatedly closed the sign frames that popped up with divine mail and strange documents. At the same time, she realized the others likely had something similar to her relationship between king and knight.

Horizon’s was obvious, but...

...There are others like me who already have their seat ready for them.

She had a feeling a lot of them had not noticed yet. She wondered what she should do from now on concerning that and other things.

“It looks like you’ve cheered up some, Lady Mitotsudaira. I’m glad.”

Mitotsudaira smiled toward Mary’s relieved voice.

“Judge. It’s true I haven’t quite been myself since Mikatagahara.”

“Judge,” replied Mary as she pulled Ex. Collbrande from the ship. “That’s right. You were feeling yourself down below just like Master Tenzou.”

Silver Wolf: “Why am I being bullied so much today!?”

Obscene: “Mitotsudaira-kun! This must be some kind of mistake!”

Sticky King: “Yes! You don’t even have the proper body part!”

Silver Wolf: “I have an obscene spirit and a slime worried for me...”

83: “If you have grown one of those, eating some curry will clear it right up.”

Mal-Ga: “Won’t a stimulant just make it bigger?”

Gold Mar: “Ga-chan! I know your deadline’s coming up, but let’s place a censorship bar over your heart right now! A really thick one!”

Mary kept her eyes on Kiyomasa and kept Excalibur standing in front of her.

“There’s no helping it. When something like that happens, no one can help but feel themselves down below, whether a lot or a little.”

Kiyomasa gave her a confused look.

“A lot or a little?”

“Judge. Everyone takes damage differently.”

“It has to do with damage? Isn’t it the opposite?”

“Not at all,” insisted Mary while thinking this should be obvious. “The more you are hit, the bigger and stronger you grow. That is what it means to be human.”

“That is what it means to be human...?”

Kiyomasa brought a hand to her forehead and seemed to be thinking about something. Finally, something seemed to hit her.

“O-oh. You mean S&M. I’ve seen it mentioned in magazine ads.”

...I’m not sure what that means, but she seems to understand now.

Mary smiled and raised Excalibur in her right hand.

“Anyway, Lady Mitotsudaira was feeling herself down below, but this battle seems to have cleared that up. Thank you very much.”

Kiyomasa glared at Mitotsudaira with emotionless eyes.

Still Got It: “Nate, what have you been doing...?”

Silver Wolf: “M-mothers are supposed to trust their daughter! They are!”

Still Got It: “Well, I don’t particularly care about this. I should probably discuss it with your father, though.”

Silver Wolf: “Don’t end the connection without hearing me out!!”

The emotion spirits told Mary that Mitotsudaira was having an intimate sign frame conversation with her mother. They seemed to be getting a little fired up, but that would not be a problem with those two.

Anyway, thought Mary as she pointed Excalibur’s raised blade toward the enemy to be polite.

Kiyomasa briefly closed her eyes when she noticed, but after a breath, she spoke.

“This is goodbye.”

“Judge. Until we meet on a proper battlefield.”

They were parted as they spoke.

The bisected ship had been standing at an intersection on the road, but the two halves began to collapse. They split apart, creaked, and whipped up the wind. The enemy’s fell north and Mary’s fell south.

But even as they moved apart, Mary asked a question of the enemy.

“You have English blood, don’t you?”

The girl’s eyebrows rose and she took a deep breath.

“How do you know that?”

“The English spirits I brought with me do not fear you. So...”

Mary threw something and the wind spirits carried it to Kiyomasa who caught it in her unharmed hand.

“This is a healing spell using both English spirit spells and Far Eastern ninja techniques. If you have English blood, then it should work well on your arm.”

“...Testament.”

The tilt of the ship grew and accelerated. The wind came from below rather than behind.

From behind, Mary heard Mitotsudaira creating a foothold with her silver chains.

She also saw Kiyomasa bow.

“Until our paths inevitably cross again. ...Because stopping your path is our path.”

Kiyomasa leaped away and vanished.

How adroit, thought Mary as she heard two sounds.

The first was applause from the townspeople.

And the other...

...A ship?

Mary jumped onto a table made by the silver chains and then onto a nearby rooftop.

She and Mitotsudaira looked westward where the diplomatic ship to Sviet Rus was beginning to rise.

A boarding net hung down from the side, so they were likely meant to use that to get onboard. But someone already held on at the bottom of the net.

...*Master Tenzou*.

10ZO: “Mary-dono, I’ve already loaded our things onboard, so how about I carry you away?”

Scarred: “Oh, my. Just like in England.”

Asama: “Eh!? Wh-what was it like!? Can you recreate it!?”

The others peering over the edge of the deck at him was charming, but...

Scarred: “Master Tenzou, are we, um, in a hurry?”

10ZO: “Judge. The ships from the three nations are hurrying this way. They likely saw the battle and want to avoid provoking Hashiba any longer than necessary. It would be best if we got going right away.”

“I see,” said Mary as she closed the sign frame and waited for his arrival.

She pulled a paper wrapping from her skirt pocket and handed it to Mitotsudaira “Here. This is a meat-wrapped rice ball they were selling at the shopping district up above.”

“Why am I not surprised?”

Mitotsudaira replied with a smile and looked up to the approaching ship. The fleets from the three nations were also visible in the west, north, and northwest.

Mary commented on them.

“Oushuu and Sviet Rus have all begun to move in regards to Musashi...”

Fukushima travelled south from the town of Mito.

She and Kiyomasa had arranged to meet at the entrance to the wooded area to the south. She stopped and furrowed her brow on the path between the vast fields that ran from the town to the forest.

“Honestly...”

She thought about what she had accomplished here. She felt they had chosen the correct time to withdraw, but...

“I may be a second year, but, though I hate to admit it, I still don’t have what it takes to be

part of an anti-Musashi unit.”

However, she had gotten a serious blow in on Musashi’s Vice Chancellor.

She was hesitant to say she had defeated her, but that was due to the cowardice she had sensed during the battle. As a matter of etiquette toward the act of combat itself, she wished she could have faced the girl at 100%. And...

“Kiyo-dono.”

“Testament...”

Kiyomasa landed next to Fukushima. She turned her back on the diplomatic ship leaving Mito’s sky and she covered her face with her right hand. She hid her eyes with the healing charm on her hand.

“Fweh...”

Sudden tears escaped and she cried. Her shoulders shook and the tears seemed to wash away the blood on her cheek.

“I’m sad...”

Fukushima slowly nodded at her tearful words.

“So am I, Kiyo-dono.”

Chapter 33: Habitual Lecturer in a Private Room

第三十三章

『個室の説教魔』



うわー
面倒なんですけど
配点（聞き流し）

Wow

Talk about a pain in the butt

Point Allocation (Ignore)

“Hey.”

A voice filled a small wooden room.

The afternoon sunlight entered through a small window.

“Hey, come on out of there, idiot. I know you’re awake.”

Narimasa stood next to the bed that was attached to the wall just like the desk. He was frowning toward a motionless lump in the bed’s blanket.

“...”

He bared his teeth toward the silent humanoid blanket but looked back toward the entrance. Toshiie stood there in a red M.H.R.R. uniform and he smiled bitterly toward the bed.

“Michi, you don’t need to worry about what happened yesterday.”

“Yes, I do.”

“What the hell? So you’ll respond to Toshi?”

“I know you’d just lecture me, Sassa.”

“What? When have I ever lectured anyone? If you’d actually face reality, maybe you wouldn’t panic on the battlefield. Make sure you don’t make the same mistake again, idiot.”

“See!? You’ve already started lecturing me!!”

“Shut up.” Narimasa kicked the bed. “Now get up.”

“I’m not listening to a villain who broke the lock and came in without asking.”

“I did ask, idiot. I said, ‘I’m coming in, you idiot’, remember?”

“You came in without waiting for me to answer! You have to mentally prepare yourself for

these things. If you understood that, maybe you wouldn't always get tasked with charging into the enemy lines and getting hurt."

"But doing that's so much easier. I can charge in, punch some people, mess up their plans, and then fall back for a breather and some healing when everyone else catches up. Having someone telling you whether to move left or right or whatever is such a pain. Toshi can handle that stuff."

"Yes, yes." Toshiie smiled and nodded by the door. "I understand, Na-chan. I understand all too well that you're known as the liberal arts type because you say so many illogical things. You normally can't win when there's only two or three of us and tens of thousands of them, so you can't smile in delight when it happens, Na-chan. We won't get a bonus if we don't make it look like we're struggling a little."

"Hold on. So when you contradictorily shout 'Wh-what!? Don't tell me they took out my Iron Ghost Division!' after only losing a thousand of your ghosts, you're just trying to make the enemy look more powerful to earn yourself a bonus?"

"Yeah. It's not easy coming up with so many ways to act surprised. Sometimes no one notices if I don't strike a pose while I'm at it. I've been working hard recently by mixing in some jumping, but it pains me to see the divine network threads commenting 'Toshiie just used his Art of Surprise!' or 'That's the tornado style!' "

"So am I actually interfering when I try to be nice and charge in to support you?"

"Stay away! Stay away!" insisted Matsu.

"So you're the greedy one!? You are, aren't you!?"

"It isn't greed, Na-chan. It's marital love. The mercenaries use up a lot of money. ...Right?"

Narimasa looked away as the couple rubbed their cheeks together and he kicked the bed again.

"Fuwa, just get up already."

"Only if you make me want to."

"Damn her..." Narimasa frowned and kicked the bed again. "Get up, Fuwa. We have three jobs we need you to do."

"Make it just one. Besides, haven't you already finished negotiating with Novgorod?"

"Yes," confirmed Toshiie. "We quickly settled on some boundaries we wouldn't cross and

they agreed not to interfere with our actions. We made a triple contract: nonaggression, noninterference, and noncooperation. ...If they try to work with Uesugi during our invasion, we will use the authority of Testament Union to turn Novgorod into Nanao Castle.”

Nanao Castle had been mentioned the day before as well.

“According to the Testament descriptions, Nanao Castle belonged to the Noto Province’s Hatakeyama clan that was allied with Oda. When it was attacked by Uesugi Kenshin, the war hawks inside killed their ruler to continue their resistance, but the supposedly impregnable castle eventually fell to Uesugi due to further betrayal from within and the outbreak of a plague. ...Almost everyone inside was wiped out.”

Meaning...

“Novgorod has already fallen victim to Ivan IV’s great purge and next it would fall victim to the Uesugi clan’s great purge. And through the recreation of a betrayal from within. ...If that happens, I can only think that floating city would literally fall.”

“But,” said the blanket. “Doesn’t Nanao Castle lead into the Battle of Tedorigawa?”

The blanket rolled to face away from the wall, but the contents remained hidden inside. However, an *insha kotob* appeared outside the blanket and displayed a list of dates.

“In the Testament descriptions, the Siege of Nanao Castle happens first, but Shibata Katsuie’s army was already moving in to reclaim the castle and crossed the Tedor River without realizing Nanao Castle had already fallen. Katsuie’s forces began to retreat when they found the castle had fallen to Kenshin,” said the blanket. “But we’ll be badly beaten and forced to run back home.”

“Stop mixing reality with the Testament descriptions. We can use some kind of interpretation there. Besides, we can make Nanao Castle and Tedorigawa different battlefields.”

“That’s right,” said Toshiie. “But as the ‘Testament Union’, we need to confirm that Novgorod really does become Nanao Castle.”

“Can’t Hashiba go?”

“Unfortunately, Hashiba planned to join the Battle of Tedorigawa but left after having trouble getting along with Shibata’s forces.”

And...

“If we do go there and the Uesugi clan requests to ‘duel’ Shibata and the rest of us, then that will trigger Tedorigawa.”

“Then what do we do?”

“You already know, don’t you?”

“Keh,” spat out Narimasa. “We just have to kick Uesugi’s ass, right? We’ve got the Testament Union on our side, so it doesn’t matter who wins Tedorigawa.”

“That’s why I’m here too, Na-chan.”

“And her too?” asked Narimasa as he kicked the bed.

The blanket let out a shriek as it and the bed bounced up into the air.

“But if we invade as a counterattack after Tedorigawa, that’ll cause our master’s assassination, won’t it?” asked Narimasa. “Are you thinking of going that far if it comes to it?”

“There are reasons why it’s better that way.”

“What do you mean?”

“After Tedorigawa, we will invade Uesugi,” said Toshiie. “But while we are attacking Uesugi’s Uozu Castle, our master is killed by Akechi at Honnouji. Our battle with Uesugi grows more extended and we are unable to rush over to help.”

“Then...”

“You’re thinking we should avoid causing Tedorigawa, aren’t you? But Hashiba controls the Testament Union and that means we actually have to keep the history recreation moving. After all, we’re the Testament Union now. That’s why we need to be prepared for a rapid response just in case. At the very least, we need to be able to begin our invasion of Uesugi immediately after finishing Tedorigawa. And to do that...”

Toshiie placed a hand on his chin and gave solemn nod.

“I’d like to get a nice attack in on Novgorod. If we can crush Uesugi all at once at Tedorigawa, we’ll have a much easier time invading them and controlling the Siege of Uozu Castle will be a lot simpler.”

“I’m always amazed by that personality of yours. I couldn’t do something like that.”

“That’s because you’re the field work type, Sassa. ...But Maeda, isn’t there another way of

using Novgorod?”

“Testament.” Toshiie nodded, opened a *lernen figur*, and displayed a map from Hokuriku to Kinki. “Novgorod is near the northern coast. When Musashi tries to return to Europe through Sviet Rus, they are certain to pass through there. We could always conquer Novgorod and use it to intercept them.”

“That’s a decent decision, but it gives me more work either way...”

“So much to do,” said Matsu.

“That’s right.” Toshiie smiled bitterly. “Hmm... Then I think I’ll take one of the three jobs meant for you, Michi. Namely, attending the fried food party Lady Oichi is holding to apologize for last night. ...I’m looking forward to the Kisu Tempura meant as a good luck charm for when we eventually face Matsudaira.”

“You guys don’t play fair!”

Fuwa poked her head out from the blanket, but she quickly covered her glasses-less face again.

“I just got up, so don’t look at me.”

“Hey, Toshi, do something about this conceited moron. I don’t want to.”

“Ha ha ha. I don’t want to either, Na-chan, so we’re even.”

“Fine, then.”

Sassa sat on the bed. He crossed his arms, ignored Fuwa’s attempts to dodge, and sighed.

“Listen, Fuwa.”

“Wh-what?”

“Hashiba’s sending something here. You should know more about it than anyone, so you need to inspect it.”

“Eh? What is it?”

“I don’t have the authority to say, so go see Shibata. Oh, but wait a while first. That idiot’s wearing an apron while he helps Lady Oichi in the kitchen, so he couldn’t be creepier. In the meantime...”

He lightly slapped Fuwa’s head a few times.

“Do some calculations. You should get more accurate results than Toshi who only just arrived from Europe.”

“About what?”

“You’ve heard that Musashi’s decided to be a real pain in the ass by sending ambassadors to Date, Mogami, and Sviet Rus, right?”

Fuwa silently confirmed she knew, so Toshiie spoke up.

“Michi, I want you to calculate out a few patterns for future changes in Musashi’s battle strength. We also have requests from Takizawa and Niwa who’ve headed that way. This is the best place to get information on Sviet Rus, on Mogami who are opposing them, and on Date who have grown quiet.”

“Hmm...”

Fuwa got up which lifted Narimasa’s hand that sat on her head. He slapped her head once more before removing his hand.

“You gonna do it then?”

“Shaja.”

She fixed the collar of the large P.A. Oda track suit she wore in place of pajamas and she roughly combed her mussed-up hair with her hands.

“You made me want to.”

“Oh, so you get fired up when there’s work to be done?”

“...”

Fuwa glared at Narimasa and slapped his head. She ignored his complaint and got out of bed, but then he saw her from behind.

“You aren’t wearing the bottom? Don’t tell me...”

“Don’t look. And it isn’t because they’re drying after last night. I have plenty of other clothes, see?”

She opened the closet in the corner of the room to reveal her collection of different nations’ uniforms. She reached for a Far Eastern one as she spoke.

“I’m interested in what Shibata wants, so I’ll do the one about Musashi’s battle strength first.

Will it be enough to do it as individuals, in cooperation, through alliances, and a mixture of the above?”

“Shaja. But Michi, do you like other nations’ uniforms that much?”

“Well, I think I just like the variation. I’m skinny, so our uniform has a surprisingly large gap below the chest. I personally like how the Hexagone Française and Qing-Takeda ones fit. I won’t be leaving the ship today, so which one should I go for? ...Any suggestions?”

“Quit wasting time on pointless crap and get to work.”

“Shaja, shaja,” she said as she pulled out some clothes.

She checked in the mirror while holding the uniforms in front of her.

“Then I think I’ll start with the Musashi job. I guess the calculations about their relationship with Date will come first.”

In which case...

“I doubt it’s going to be easy for Musashi, so maybe I should include that when I’m thinking about all this.”

The red room had red carpet, red fabric on the walls, and a red ceiling.

The large room was illuminated by lights embedded in the ceiling and walls. The bed attached to the wall was white, the desk was a dark wooden color, and a girl stood in the center of the room.

“Are these my options?”

She had long black hair, white skin, a green inner suit, and metal limbs painted red.

She was Date Narumi.

Colors were spread out before her eyes. The formal outfits in the room’s closet had been lined up on the red floor.

“Even if welcoming the ambassador is a diplomatic role, do I really have to wear something like this?”

She sighed, crossed her arms, and looked to the clothing lined up on the thick carpet. Even if they were dress clothes...

“Our nation is cold, so what are we trying to prove by leaving the chest open like that?”

She had chosen them herself, so complaining was not going to help.

Her aides had chosen some and she had been given some others, but she had left them in the living room because she did not think they suited her.

...I'm not a diplomat in the first place.

So why did she need something like this now?

Kagetsuna-kun: “Narumi-kun, you always buy clothes or makeup when you're feeling stressed or in a good mood! It's a bad habit or, to put it another way, a nice vice, so how about giving some of that money to the poor who are suffering every single day, by which I mean me!? How about it!? Just 120 yen is enough! Okay, nearly convinced her this time! Oh, and I was wondering why you would buy so many clothes you never wear, but isn't this the perfect chance to wear them all at once!? You could say you're wearing layers because it's cold! You could say it's a fat suit! C'mon, do it!”

Unturning: “That isn't funny, so tone it down a little.”

Kagetsuna-kun: “Okay... How should I put it...? Um, are you mad...?”

Unturning: “I always have to wonder how you can switch back and forth like that.”

Kagetsuna-kun: “Yeah... It's probably a stimulation of the brain.”

Unturning: “So what do you want?”

Katakura took a moment to respond.

Kagetsuna-kun: “Isn't the red one fine?”

“In what way?” she asked with a frown, but she did not type it into the sign frame. That guy would trip you up in almost everything, but he never missed when it truly mattered.

But...

Unturning: “No, I'll choose for myself.”

Kagetsuna-kun: “Are you curious?”

“Of course not,” she said without typing it in.

Unturning: “I would never wear something like this, so I want to choose for myself. That's

all.”

Kagetsuna-kun: “But...”

There was a pause before the rest of Katakura’s words arrived.

Kagetsuna-kun: “That means you think this is important.”

Unturning: “If you keep interpreting things the way you want, I’ll tell Rusu-san.”

Kagetsuna-kun: “D-don’t do that, Narumi-kun! You always do this! You always rely on others instead of attacking me yourself! Doesn’t it hurt your heart that Rusu-san has been getting careless while scolding me lately!? Oh, poor Rusu-san! Do you *want* to see me moaning in pain as he scolds me!? Do you!? You do, don’t you? Well, if you insist, I’ll get everything set up to record it and then head on over to Rusu-san’s place! Don’t you regret it when you see me going all out! Goodbye.”

Unturning: “I have a feeling you would fit in at Musashi. And I’ll tell Rusu-san to prepare a water-filled cell for you.”

Kagetsuna-kun: “You’re inciting me to rebel and then punishing me!? How convenient!”

“Enough of that,” she said while looking out the southern window.

There were shadows in the sky. They were a flat diplomatic ship and the transport ship accompanying it from Musashi. They would arrive in a few more minutes and a Date ship would tow them.

Unturning: “How are things on the other side?”

Kagetsuna-kun: “Well! According to the scouts, they’ve sent out someone to monitor the situation! And a troublesome someone for us! If Masamune-kun reacts, we’ll do something about it, so you do things your way there!”

Unturning: “Testament. In that case, I think I’ll go with the red one.”

She went with Katakura’s suggestion. After all...

Unturning: “There’s no point in dressing up.”

For one thing, she had no one to dress up for.

...*That’s right.*

All four of her limbs were prosthetics and the Vice Chancellor was expected to fight. No one

had ever been able to keep up with her. Some had treated her nicely, but due to the issues with her body and personality, she ended up doubting their true motives.

“Not only am I the Vice Chancellor, but there’s also that old failure of mine.”

Once this job was over, she wanted to get something to drink. She wanted to drink down a full cup of junmai sake.

But escaping from reality with those thoughts was not going to change who she was. With that in mind, she looked back to the chat sign frame.

Kagetsuna-kun: You really are a girl, aren’t you?”

“What do you mean by that?” she said while looking out the window.

She did not matter. The Vice Chancellor was the academy’s military representative and nothing more than that, so she needed to focus on Date’s future path.

“We’re all about to start dealing with the troublesome history surrounding Oushuu, Sviet Rus, and even Kantou.”

Narumi stared out the window as she spoke.

“First of all, we need to sacrifice Musashi.”

Chapter 34: Travelers in Three Directions

第三十四章

『三方の行者』



行き先に見る物
行き先に見る者
それぞれの違いとは
配点 (来たりか行くか)

What is the difference between

The things seen at one's destination

And the people seen at one's destination?

Point Allocation (Arriving or Going)

Someone on the surface viewed the three fleets in the sky.

It was Masazumi. She, Asama, and Kimi were using a triple telescopic sign frame to view them from the terrace on the roof of the control building for the large land port in Mito's forest. The sign frame showed the Musashi's diplomatic ships joining the fleets arriving from three different directions.

The ones bound for Date and Mogami had apparently already arrived at their respective fleets. A defense barrier was placed around both the fleets and the newly arrived diplomatic ships to demonstrate that they had been welcomed in.

However, the ship bound for Sviet Rus had been a little delayed, so that fleet had to wait.

"I guess we're letting them know we'll be here until the diplomatic ships reach them."

The armored transport ships that had seen the diplomatic ships off were passing by overhead on their way back to the Ariake.

Masazumi and the other girls had yet to return to the Ariake.

Some ships had left Mito for the Musashi, but Masazumi wanted to avoid returning to the hidden Ariake until the diplomatic ships had arrived. They had only sent Futayo back ahead of them because she was injured.

Futayo had been found unconscious and sitting in front of a shop.

She had likely intended to take a short rest after getting up and starting back to the land port on her own. She had been sitting on the bench in front of a sweets shop with her spear in her arms. They had only learned where she was because Mitotsudaira had been informed by the locals.

...Will she be okay?

Naomasa had said the Ariake was ready to receive her, but Masazumi was still worried.

...To think Hashiba's fighters would attack here.

If Hashiba entered the Mito territory – even to reject it – she would be interfering with the history recreation beyond her era, so she had sent the commanders serving her who would live to that era.

“Even if Hashiba didn't order that, they were willing to act on their own to help her.”

Masazumi was feeling a little concerned, but Asama walked over with a smile.

“It's okay, Masazumi. We'll be safe once we get back to the Musashi.”

“Judge. I know that. ...I shouldn't be letting my concern show that plainly.”

“Maa.”

“Yes, yes.”

Masazumi pressed her cheek against Tsukinowa. Asama must have decided Tsukinowa could handle comforting Masazumi because she simply opened a sign frame while still smiling.

“I just received divine transmissions saying Yoshiyasu and Adele have arrived at Mogami's fleet and Suzu-san and Urquiaga-kun have arrived at Date's fleet. That just leaves Toori-kun's group. They were delayed a little, but they probably needed some time to refresh after that battle.”

“The negotiations with the three nations have only just begun and we've already run into issues.”

“I know,” agreed Asama before giving a gasp of realization. She tapped on the Date fleet on the north end of the sign frame.

The magnification increased. When Hanami flew in and tapped on it a few more times, the blurry image was processed and the god of war mothership Kawai Castle became visible in the center of the distant Date fleet.

Kawai Castle had deactivated its defense spells to let the diplomatic ship in, so its deck was visible. The specks seen there were probably Urquiaga and Suzu. There were also some diplomatic aides including automatons.

Someone left the bridge to greet them.

“Is that Date Narumi?”

“Eh? Is that a surprise?”

“Yes. Kawai Castle belongs to Oniniwa Tsunamoto. And is Date Narumi wearing what I think she is?”

The image was small, but it looked like a dress blowing in the wind.

Narumi felt something she had not felt in a long time.

...Complete and utter regret. Why would I go out in the wind dressed like this?

Her regret came from the light material with no armor. It probably would have been fine on the surface or indoors, but on an aerial ship's deck, the wind whipped the clothing around even with air buffering.

It was the same wind she always felt, so why was she so bothered by it? Her hair whipping around had never been an issue, but the westerly wind from the right was also affecting her dress's skirt.

“...Ah.”

If she did not hold it down, it would lift up and reveal her legs, the base of her legs, and her butt. She normally had those areas exposed to more easily summon Unturning Centipede, but it felt careless to leave the areas hidden by the skirt so defenseless.

...Kh.

She found a way of holding her hands that held down about eighty percent of the skirt. She placed her right hand down to hold the skirt against the front of her right thigh. She gave up on the left of the skirt and faced forward.

“Musashi 2nd Special Duty Officer Kiyonari Urquiaga, are you the ambassador?”

“No, the ambassador is Mukai here, the Musashi's Acting Captain. I am merely accompanying her.”

He looked to the hand on her skirt.

“But what are you doing there?”

“I-I am not doing anything. Whatever are you talking about?”

“I see.”

As the half-dragon nodded, Ambassador Mukai looked up at him while holding her bangs and

skirt down against the wind.

“The wind...is strong.”

“Judge. The Musashi’s atmospheric defenses are set to residential standards, so the wind will naturally be stronger on a warship. But...”

He looked to Narumi’s right hand on her skirt.

“Mukai, you could learn a thing or two from the Date clan. ...This level of wind is apparently not worth mentioning for them.”

Narumi seriously considered knocking him to the deck, but then she heard the Chancellor’s Officers support members whispering behind her.

“Hey, maybe we should have upped the buffering more. Suzu-san is having trouble!”

“B-but this way we get to see her squirming around like that.”

“I feel bad for her yet I can’t deny I’m enjoying it. Is this what you call man’s sinful nature?”

That girl must be fairly popular, realized Narumi as the half dragon approached her while opening a sign frame to display a few pieces of official paperwork.



“Now, let us begin our diplomatic visit with a handshake.”

Narumi realized what he was after when she saw his outstretched right arm and three fingers raised from his right front wing, but this was a scene of diplomacy. She maintained a smile and returned his handshake with her right hand. She squeezed as hard as she could with her false hand, but he accepted it with the strength of a half-dragon. Then the wind blew in from the right.

Without the hand to hold it down, her skirt blew violently upwards and the half-dragon immediately let go of her hand.

“Sorry. You should have shaken hands with Mukai, not me. I got a little carried away there.”

...*Why you-...!!*

Her smile stiffened as she silently protested, but she still shook hands with the actual ambassador. The ambassador was able to use her left hand to hold down her skirt as the wind was coming from her left.

I chose the wrong position on the battlefield, Narumi belatedly realized as the half-dragon looked to the bridge.

“Well, you are the Vice Chancellor, so I can guess you do not often wear clothes like that. They suit you well and they were an appropriate choice for a diplomatic meeting. This was merely an unfortunate location.”

“...Eh?”

That must mean Kagetsuna made the right choice this time too, she thought.

But...

“Choose for yourself next time.”

“_____”

He saw right through me, she thought. *But how?* she also thought with a slight disturbance in her heart.

“Um.”

The ambassador raised the hand still held in Narumi’s handshake. She must have wanted to let go, so Narumi frantically did so and bowed. When she apologized and took the girl’s hand again, the ambassador nodded.

“U-um, Urquiaga-kun...i-isn't a b-bad person.”

“...Eh?”

“He does like...elder sisters...though.”

“That's right,” said Narumi while glaring at the half-dragon.

...Why did he even come to Date? Don't tell me...

Our Masamune is a girl. And according to the Testament descriptions, Masamune had a younger brother. In other words, Masamune is an elder sister.

Don't tell me, she thought again, so she decided to ask.

“Musashi 2nd Special Duty Officer, I would like to know why you came here to Date. Would you mind telling me?”

“You don't know?” he asked with a sigh. “My goal is to...yes, complete the elder sister character's arc in this game of diplomacy.”

Just as the half-dragon said that like it should be obvious, the Mogami fleet to their west lowered its defense spell. They had welcomed in their diplomatic ship just as Date had.

As Urquiaga and Suzu began their diplomacy with the Date clan, a discussion was taking place inside the diplomatic ship bound for the Mogami clan.

“Yoshiyasu-san! Are you sure you don't need to head out for the diplomatic meeting!?”

“Yes. At this point, it will only be a greeting. Plus, it's the vassal's job to deal with Mogami's summarized demands.”

Yoshiyasu answered the maintenance worker's question while wearing a Far Eastern summer uniform and resting a wrench on her shoulder.

She was not in her room aboard the diplomatic ship. She was in Righteousness's hangar.

On the Musashi, the engine division chief and the others would make sure the god of war was held in place properly and that the surrounding equipment was functioning, but they had a lot less personnel here. The Mogami diplomatic ship had not asked to greet her, so she was spending her time on maintenance like usual. But...

“Yoshiyasu-san, what kind of land is Mogami?”

“Well,” said Yoshiyasu to gather the maintenance workers’ attention. She used her wrench as a cane, and faced the north wall that hid the Mogami fleet from view. “The Mogami clan is almost single-handedly managed by Mogami Yoshiaki, their Chancellor and Student Council President. They have no Vice President or Vice Chancellor and a Mouse named Shakenobe assists her by taking on the role of both Secretary and Treasurer. That might make it sound like a small-scale academy, but it isn’t. They rule the entire western half of Oushuu. That may be a frozen land, but it has high productivity thanks to the large-scale land cultivation, marine products, and forest resources.”

...They also have the excellent sense and charismatic leadership of Yoshiaki.

“As Chancellor, Yoshiaki has expanded Mogami’s power by wiping out local clans and using clever tactics to pull off sneak attacks or to incite infighting among those clans. She has a cruel character unique to Oushuu, but that strong will and powerful rule have-...”

“Have allowed her people to prosper, so they’re willing to follow her in this frozen land?”

“That’s right,” answered Yoshiyasu. “The more severe she is, the more people sense a survivor’s strength in her. ...People are drawn to someone who shows they can make full use of their authority, military might, intelligence, and experience. She is a leader in the truest sense of the word.”

That ability is something I lack at the moment, thought Yoshiyasu with a sigh.

“But, well...”

As everyone watched, she put her hands on her hips and looked up at Righteousness in its formal clothing.

“If you’ll move, I guess that means even I have the virtue of righteousness.”

...I should probably assume that’s all I have for now.

That was when she heard a sound.

It was a distant sound and she nearly mistook it for the rumbling of the wind, but...

...The Technohexen.

The two sounds came from the Musashi. It was the loud noise produced when Musashi’s Technohexen took off into the sky.

“I suppose it would be Musashi’s Technohexen that keep watch on the skies with those three nations so close.”

The blue sky did not exist low to the ground. At low altitudes, the sky was only a gathering of air that felt like a thick invisible wall of resistance.

Only the sticky weight of the air existed in that low region, but two lines accelerated up through it. Water vapor trailed behind the colors white and black.

The two Technohexen flew as if hopping up from the Ariake.

The black-haired, black-winged one in white moved out a bit ahead and shouted back to the gold-haired, gold-winged one in black. She looked back while using her pen on the crop mark frame Magie Figur drawn by her mouth.

“Margot! Has ‘Musashino’ contacted us yet!?”

“Judge, judge,” said Margot while holding a Magie Figur in front of her smiling face.

The speedometer-style Magie Figur displayed a large room and a maid automaton.

The maid with shoulder-length hair was “Musashino”. She bowed.

“Naruze-sama, I have sent you the basic data as an attachment. Suzu-sama created a 3D model of the surroundings, so please make corrections using that. Over.”

A Magie Figur opened to indicate the data had been sent over. Naruze was surprised at the quality of Suzu’s map of the surrounding terrain and considered using her as a background assistant for her next doujinshi.

“With the Musashi inside the Ariake, you still can’t get any external information, right? I’ll send back whatever we get, so will you check over it?”

“Judge,” Musashino Captain “Musashino” bowed while opening several sign frames.

Musashino: “Thank you very much. Because the Ariake is currently in stealth mode, the acquisition of external information beyond specific links is difficult. Over.”

“It’s fine. We all need to help each other out. ...We’re up to the altitude the Musashi normally flies at. I’ll send the visual data back, so please analyze it.”

Weiss Fräulein’s rail wings opened from Naruze’s waist hard points using a special joint and she pointed them toward the surface to put Weiss Fräulein in a vertical orientation.

She came to a stop.

“Now, then.”

Naruze stretched her body out. She stretched out parallel to the ground with Weiss Fräulein standing vertically.

“A few of our Chancellor’s Officers and others with weapons left for those diplomatic visits, so we need to show the other nations we still have some people who can fight, right? Isn’t that why we were sent all the way up here to check on our surroundings?”

As Naruze bent back as if to rest her back on the earth below, Margot caught up.

“What’s wrong with that? Only England and a portion of Eastern Europe have official Technohexen forces. For the academies of this region in particular, we’ll probably be seen as a threat because we’re an unknown.”

Margot took the same pose, but behind Naruze rather than next to her.

The white and black girls were close enough to rest their heads on the other’s shoulder.

“Then let’s start gathering that data. ‘Musashino’, you analyze it, okay?”

Naruze moved her hand to draw several Magie Figur next to them. They finally became a ring surrounding the two *schale besen*.

“That sets up the 360 degree optical vision spells to receive the image. ...We’ll take the standard amount, ten times that, and thirty times that. I should store this under the spell name Burning Surroundings.”

A line of light ran along the ring of Magie Figur. That line drew out the surrounding scenery as seen from the ring. The original data was drawn by Suzu, but the art style changed to match Naruze’s Magie Figur.

...Even Suzu’s readings get iffy at more than twenty kilometers out when she’s inside the Ariake in stealth mode.

That was still more than enough, but that put the diplomatic ships from the three nations on the very edge.

And of course...

“That’s why we were sent out.”

Once the dozens of Magie Figur forming the horizontal ring finished drawing out the scenery,

they automatically gathered in Naruze's hand. She gathered them in a neat stack, and...

"Margot."

"Oh, yes, yes. Here."

Margot opened a Magie Figur displaying the envelope icon for shared storage on Musashi's divine network. Naruze stuck the stack of Magie Figur into that envelope icon.

The rest was simple. Margot tapped the envelope icon to close it.

"And that sends it to Musashino's bridge. Maybe we should tell her."

As soon as Margot hit the send button, a new Magie Figur opened. It displayed "Musashino" on the bridge. She held up an envelope icon next to her face.

"Thank you very much. Over."

"I'm glad the divine transmission lines are so fast. ...Oh."

She noticed another new Magie Figur. Wondering what it was, she checked the sender field.

"Wild Kamelie?"

Naruze frowned as she drew their senior's face in the Magie Figur.

"What is it, Wild Kamelie? What happened to Almirante? Attacked by a Technohexen again? So what does our non-student unmarried old hag of a second-in-command want? If it's about being Edel Brocken's tester, we won't give you back that position even if you get down on the ground and beg. Normal prostrations aren't enough to move us anymore. ...They're losing their effect."

"If you want to be on the receiving end of my high high altitude cannon spell named Blooming Flower Beam, you can always just say so. ...And little girl, I assume you know just why I'm speaking with you."

"Judge. I know. ...You want to be in one of my doujinshi, don't you? There's a bit of a line, but I can squeeze you in somewhere."

A shell flew up from below and passed by two meters on their right.

Naruze glared up at the shell as it vanished into the sky.

“You weren’t even trying to hit? You really suck at this. Not that it matters when we’ve got defense spells.”

“I was firing blind form inside the stealth barrier, you know? ...Hm? What is it, Almirante? You want me to hurry up? But this is normal for us. And go to sleep!!”

“See, you got him mad at you. ...But I more or less understand, Wild Kamelie. You’re from the east, right? So what’s your opinion as the former second-in-command of M.H.R.R.’s Anti-Russia Technohexen Brigade? Your primary enemy, Novgorod, has made peace with P.A. Oda and has betrayed Sviet Rus, but do you have some information on Sviet Rus related to that?”

“Judge. There’s a chance a parent is going to show up to this three-party meeting.”

“What?”

Naruze frowned and Margot tapped her on the shoulder.

She leaned back even further to look at the Magie Figur that Margot held up. The speedometer-style Magie Figur displayed an envelope icon. Naito touched it, which opened...

“The transparent image of our surroundings based on ‘Musashino’s’ analysis.”

The data they had sent had already been sent back after analysis by the automaton’s high speed decisions.

Naruze reopened it and viewed it.

...Is there something here?

As if to answer her, several torii-style sign frames opened horizontally around her in the previous direction from before.

The translucent monitor portion displayed the results of the data analysis. Writing and icons had been added by the automaton to provide information on what she was looking at. But...

“The red light indicates the other nations’ fleets, right?”

Naruze knew why there was no emotion in Margot’s voice.

The three nations’ diplomatic ships were glowing red with Sviet Rus to the west, Mogami to the northwest, and Date to the north.

“But there’s also one coming from Edo in the south.”

The red dot of light was small but definitely approaching. And with numbers in the hundreds, not just the dozens.

“Hashiba’s ships are coming here!?”

And...

“Ga-chan! Incoming cannon fire!!”

Naruze saw the light of cannon fire, but it was not coming from the Hashiba fleet in the south.

The light flashed from the escort ships accompanying the diplomatic ships to the north, north-northwest, and northwest.

They were ultra-long range ether cannons and their light stretched toward...

“Ariake! Put up your defenses!!”

Naruze cried out just as light began exploding in a seemingly empty area of sky.

The Ariake had been hit.

And the attack had come from the Sviet Rus, Mogami, and Date fleets here for diplomacy.

Naruze could not figure out why they would do that, but she did know one thing. She opened a Magie Figur and shouted to the Ariake and the Musashi.

“We’re under attack! The enemy is Sviet Rus, Mogami, Date, and Hashiba!!”

She raised her eyebrows and looked sharply to the southern sky.

“Hashiba is approaching to monitor the other three nations and they’re inciting them to attack us!”

Chapter 35: Messenger from the South

第三十五章

『南方の使い』



南の方
難儀な方位
何かを迫る包囲
配点 (役者揃い)

The south

Such a troublesome direction

The circle narrows in on something

Point Allocation (The Cast Has Gathered)

“Wh-what is going on!?” asked Asama of the sign frame sent to her and the explosions of sound and light overhead. “We just sent our ambassadors to the three nations and everything was looking fine, so what’s with this stuff whooshing by and going boom and then all the danger coming in from Edo!?”

“Ahh, I more or less understood that, so is it too late for me?”

On the land port terrace, Masazumi somehow managed to keep herself from hanging her head and instead looked up into the sky.

Bright lights were scattering there as evidence that ether cannons were striking the Ariake.

After a short delay, the sounds of impact arrived like distant thunder.

She could feel the overlapping rumblings in her gut and she heard the columns and walls of the control building creaking a little below her.

Alarm bells began to ring in the town of Mito. Sign frames opened around the town to guide people to evacuation sites. Five larger sign frames opened in the town’s sky.

“Hello. I’m Mishina Shouichi, manager for Kantou IZUMO. Sorry about all the troub-...”

Voices erupted from the town.

“Don’t display a guy in Mito’s sky!”

“Don’t waste that high resolution divine monitor on a close up of a guy!”

“Any married men can get lost!”

Asama looked to the town visible past the forest and below the hill.

“Yes, yes,” she nodded. “Mito might be one of the Far East’s provisionally ruled lands, but they’re a lot like us, aren’t they?”

“They also responded well to Mitotsudaira’s transport ship surfing earlier, so I’m glad they can handle a panic.”

The sign frame’s image switched over to an automaton. She had long light brown hair, a narrow face, and closed eyes.

“Good day, everyone. I am Ariake Captain ‘Ariake’. Over.”

A cheer rose from the town.

“Eight shots are about to hit. Over.”

Explosions of light filled the sky and fear filled the people’s voices, but “Ariake” and the interior of the Ariake behind her remained motionless.

“My ship is nine kilometers long, four kilometers wide, and two kilometers tall, so ultra-long range cannon fire from Kraken-class escort ships is simply not enough to harm-... What is it, Mishina-sama? Oh, the Date clan has sent out a god of war unit. Yes, I have detected them, so it would indeed seem they have. I have determined this puts even the Ariake in danger. In other words, there is a possibility of damage. ...Everyone, please follow the original plan and head to the evacuation sites. Over.”

The people raised a cry of agreement while evacuating from the town of Mito. They were moving southwest, toward the sea.

“That’s Kantou IZUMO for you...”

Masazumi wondered why Asama sounded so serious yet did not look back her way, but to understand the current situation, she described the situation before her eyes.

“Sviet Rus, Mogami, and Date are being monitored by Hashiba, so they’ve turned on Musashi.”

“Shift the engine division to standby!! Men, give each other a kick in the rear and get to your posts!”

The engine division’s chief shouted over the running pressurizers and everyone replied with “judge”.

As Unneeded #4 of the Sanada Ten Braves, Isa had infiltrated the area and she nodded with her disguised face.

While some took off running and some instructed others to follow them, she too began to run.

She took up the rear position of a group of those following someone, but when they came across a different group that seemed to be heading below ground...

“Oh, I’ll go this way.”

She switched groups and started below ground.

She wanted to get below the engine division.

...Where they have the gravitational acceleration equipment.

Gravitational acceleration was the cornerstone of the Musashi’s high-speed mobility. If she could set up some sabotage there and trigger it at some important moment, the giant ship would be nothing more than a heavy hunk of metal.

However, something interested her beyond simply setting up the sabotage. The Musashi was entering standby mode, so...

...The engine division has decided the Musashi is capable of leaving port!

The Musashi could take flight at any time.

Of course, it was not in a perfect state just yet. The residential areas were not complete and a lot of the armor had yet to be added on. However, this situation told her something.

“The Musashi’s expanded combat abilities are ready enough that they think they can finish them up after leaving port.”

What kind of weapons did they add on? wondered Isa.

Since the night before, she had seen the ships’ surfaces, including the covered areas. The combat improvements were primarily expanded armor and added cannons.

But that would not be enough to take on Hashiba’s Azuchi Castle. The Musashi’s added cannons were single cannons added to the edges of the surface areas and the dual main cannons on the first starboard, port, and central ships while the Azuchi Castle had triple main cannons and more than double the cannons overall.

Isa was interested in the line of gravitational accelerator pressurizers stretching front to back along the bottom of Musashino’s bridge and she was interested in the ram-like object on Musashino’s bow.

The former was likely to increase overall speed by adding accelerators to the bridge that became dead weight during gravitational acceleration. And the latter...

...They sliced the Regno Unito in two at Mikawa, so are they planning something similar?

Like with a galley, they may have been planning to skewer the enemy with a ram and then begin hand-to-hand combat or close-range cannon fire.

...But P.A. Oda's ships are generally galley types, so the Azuchi has the upper hand there too.

And, thought Isa. They didn't have enough time.

In Isa's opinion, they needed heavy armor and a large main cannon to compete with the Azuchi Castle and Hashiba's fleet. Equipping something like that would require more than just changing the ship's exterior. The interior would need to be reinforced and quite a few design changes would have to be made.

But Musashi had not even spent a full month at the Ariake.

She doubted they could make such fundamental changes in that time. Of course, it was possible that was only a failing in her own imagination.

...But the materials moving around inside the Ariake and the exterior I've seen doesn't point toward such major reinforcement work having been done.

What work had been done as the foundation of their ability to fight?

"Hey, is the Musashi still not going to fight, even with all this going on?"

She spoke to the worker in front of her as she followed the group below ground.

The young man looked like someone who had recently graduated and he must have seen Isa as his junior. He and the adults running with him all looked back her way.

"I don't really know. I don't know what's going on up above."

"Yeah, we all have our posts," said one of the adults. "The exterior group was the one that attached the cannons and we're the power system group. I haven't seen you around, so are you with the boss?"

"No, I came from below to do some odd jobs. ...I thought I might be more help here than with the other group."

She then added an "oh" of realization and feigned being a newcomer to all this.

“I can do wiring and stuff. I was doing that up above.”

The men laughed while running past a sign frame sounding an alarm.

“Then maybe we can have you crawl into some tight areas. The gravitational acceleration sector has gotten pretty cramped.”

She wanted to ask what they meant by that, but she resisted. She only wanted to ask because she could guess what things were like inside, but there was something else she had to say now.

“Slipping into tight spaces is my specialty. But is it really that cramped? Is something stuffed in there?”

“It moves now. No, really it’s that the movable range has been expanded.” The previous young man grabbed at a square space of empty air with his right hand. “The gravitational acceleration sector is lined with accelerators like this and they all turn in the direction of pressurization while accelerating, you see. Before, they were only made for moving straight ahead or turning left and right, but we’ve removed that restriction.”

While wondering what that meant, Isa tilted her head and asked a question.

“So it’s easier to change direction now?”

“It’s probably easier to control while drifting too. The piloting group – that is, the bridge automatons and my underclassmen – thought it up.”

“Quit trying to act like their superior,” cut in the adults with bitter smiles.

Isa saw the young man give a similar smile.

...Oh, whoops, whoops.

This place isn’t all that bad, she thought.

“Ah ha ha.”

She was allowed to laugh during conversations like this.

She let the laugh come naturally and the adults called out to her.

“If you’re free, then learn the ropes here and then head to the back.”

“Are you already done here?”

“Mostly. Takao and Oume are taking a bit more time for the inner hull.”

“There are gravitational accelerators in the inner hull of Takao and Oume?”

I didn't know that, she thought.

Musashi's gravitational acceleration was generally done from the outer hulls. The inner hulls were only used as auxiliary accelerators to avoid needing any buffering between ships. But according to the young man...

“Judge. I think they're for more mobility. Before, pretty much only the accelerators in the outer hull were used during gravitational acceleration, but I think they're going to have some open up from the inner hull too. I doubt it will be easy since Musashino and Okutama will have to manage the buffering, but it should increase our speed. Also,” he said slowly. “That should increase our odds of survival too.”

“Survival?”

What that meant changed depending on how she took that word. That may have been why he forced a smile.

“Well, that's only if we're unlucky. The Musashi has some tough defenses, after all.”

“Hey,” cut in the adults while sending nods and the remnants of smiles her way. “Leave it at that. Part of our job is to, well, increase that luck. And it's time to get to work on that.”

They pointed forward and a long, dull sound came from above.

“That was the third barrage. The gap between was shorter than before.”

Which meant...

“The three nations surrounding us are getting closer and attacking more seriously.”

While the Musashi sat motionless inside the Ariake, Musashino's bridge cut off all footage from outside to become a space surrounded by white walls. During the recent remodeling, the bridge had become an information processing control room, but...

“Enter standby mode! After confirming internal connections, release all divine transmission pathways and synchronize all ships under the defenses of the Asama Shrine's divine protections. Over.”

“Musashi's” voice reached them via voice divine transmission and the light of sign frames

glowed from the four walls and the floor.

“Judge. Over.”

Text began to scroll by and several images began to play.

A portion of one white wall slid slowly inwards to reveal the torii-style program chip within. An automaton entered from the corridor with the program chip for leaving port loaded on a cart.

“Make the switch. Over!”

On “Musashino’s” signal and command, an automaton on the bridge used her gravitational control to pull the old program chip out. The automaton with the cart stuck the cart and its chip into the opened hole. After pushing it inside, she exchanged a glance with the bridge automaton.

“Connected! Over.”

“Confirmed. Over.”

She tilted the cart before pulling it out. The previous chip was placed on the now-empty cart with gravitational control and the automaton pushed the cart back out into the corridor.

Meanwhile, the wall closed with the new chip inside and many more sign frames appeared on the bridge.

“We have the engine division’s authorization! Shifting to standby mode! Over.”

A model of the Musashi appeared in the center of the bridge. It was an enlarged version of the model Suzu had made. It was made of white light and blue light gradually covered the bottom.

“Hull-style Special #06 Susashizunami Mk. III. Output is slightly lowered but within acceptable ranges in the third ships. Activation possible in five minutes twenty-seven seconds. Over.”

The automaton handling divine transmissions by the wall suddenly turned back toward the others.

“While checking Naito-sama and Naruze-sama’s information, a divine transmission arrived from Kashima Shrine on the surface. Connecting to the main screen! Over.”

With those words, a torii-style sign frame appeared on the front end of the ceiling.

It displayed a fleet flying calmly above the southern plain.

“That is a Hashiba fleet. There are seventy-two belonging to Hashiba, sixteen belonging to Houjou, and twenty-four belonging to P.A. Oda. The warships have moved out to the front, so I will zoom in while providing commentary. Over.”

The ship in the very lead was a Kraken-class diplomatic ship that could also be seen as a decorated warship.

The top was a white boxy structure supported by four pillars. The bottom was a white P.A. Oda galley-style ship.

“Is that...?”

When the automatons saw the cloud decorations with gilded edges, they matched the image to their memories.

As they all worked to retrieve data on the ship, one on the starboard side raised her right hand.

“According to my data, that is the Jurakudai, a Hashiba diplomatic battleship. According to the history recreation, it belongs to Hashiba Hidetsugu, Hashiba Hideyoshi’s nephew. Over.”

Chapter 36: Above and Below in a Place of Meeting

第三十六章

『会う場所の上下』



右と左も
結構大事な
お互い足場の
探し合い
配点（位置関係）

Right and left

Are also fairly important

When searching for

Each other's footing

Point Allocation (Respective Positions)

“Hashiba Hidetsugu is entering Kantou? ...So they've gone that route, have they?”

In Mito's general use land port, Masazumi crossed her arms to think after hearing about Hidetsugu's arrival.

Next to her, Asama was managing Musashi's divine transmissions with a sign frame.

“What does it mean for a member of Hashiba's family to come here? And Masazumi, that reaction sounded a lot like something Neshinbara-kun would say.”

Me: “Oh, I thought that too. It really sounded like him.”

Vice President: “Shut up, you! Are you actually wearing your clothes!?”

10ZO: “That's what you're worried about? And I think Asama-dono was the one that brought it up.”

Vice President: “Oh, yeah... I just went with my usual reaction. Sorry, idiot.”

Me: “Th-that's not much of an apology!”

Pipe down.

She needed to focus on the enemy, not the crossdresser.

Hashiba Hidetsugu was a member of Hashiba's family. According to the Testament descriptions, he was Hashiba's nephew, but...

“Hashiba's nephew Hidetsugu was originally expected to be Hashiba's successor. He was more of the politician type and he tended toward the Kamigata region, but the Testament says he also had a link to Oushuu.”

“I heard about that last night. Didn’t he trigger Hashiba’s anger?”

“Judge.” Masazumi nodded. “Yes, Hidetsugu committed suicide. And by association, so did his concubine, but that concubine was Komahime, daughter of the Mogami family which rules northwestern Siberia. And if Hashiba Hidetsugu is here with the Jurakudai...”

She brushed up her bangs.

“I can only guess, but Mogami has probably already sent Komahime to Hashiba. ...And Hisahide’s fleet will claim they are here because Komahime wanted to greet Mogami.”

“You mean...Komahime is being used as a hostage against Mogami?”

Masazumi hesitated for a moment before answering.

“That’s right. I can’t confirm any of this since we haven’t seen any of them yet, but Mogami’s beloved daughter must have already been taken hostage.”

Masazumi sighed.

...This isn’t good.

She had a few thoughts on the matter, but one of them was most important of all.

...The Mogami clan probably only had to hand over their daughter to Hashiba because of our loss.

It all went back to the battle they had lost three weeks before.

After that, the Mogami clan had decided Matsudaira could not protect Kantou from P.A. Oda.

“The Mogami clan has taken Hashiba’s side. ...That means we’re their enemy.”

“In that case,” asked the Aoi Sister who had remained quiet thus far. “What do you think Hashiba’s strategy here is? Something dirty? After all, before it was her subordinates and now it’s her family. Is that Monkey Girl that bothered by us?”

“Judge. I’m guessing she wants to give us a warning. And their strategy is simple. ...On the pretext of letting Komahime greet her family, they’re going to monitor the three nations to see just how they respond to the diplomats we’ve sent.”

“Then what are we going to do?” asked Asama.

The Aoi Sister smiled and shook her head.

“Do you really think there’s any chance we’re just going to sit idly by?”

“That’s right. There’s no chance we’d sit idly by, nor is there any reason to.”

Naruze spoke as she drew the surroundings from the sky and sent the drawing to the Musashi.

She tilted her head and looked down to the forest and land port clearings. There were eight land ports containing Musashi’s residents. There were people on and around the moored transport ships.

“We’re at the center of attention here. What do you think would happen if we didn’t do anything now? They’d think we had no intention of putting up any more of a fight after our loss.”

“Ga-chan, you’re tone’s getting a little harsh there.”

Naruze smiled bitterly at that.

“I’m hopeless. I like idiots, but I hate cowards. So…”

So…

Mal-Ga: “Please, Masazumi. Find a way to settle this as peacefully as possible. …Like an immediate counterattack or something.”

…Why is so much of our class so naturally bloodthirsty?

However, Masazumi knew mentally holding her head was not going to solve this, so she scratched at her head and opened her mouth.

“Hmm… If the three nations are going to turn on us, I guess there’s no chance of working with Date.”

Asama gasped at that and then glanced over at Masazumi.

“U-um… Should I really be hearing this?”

“Heh heh heh. Don’t be silly, Asama! Are you planning to shoot at them without knowing why?”

“Oh, um, but, well, shooting things technically isn’t my job...”

“You can hear this,” said Masazumi. “You’re in charge of the divine transmissions after all.”

But now that she thought about it, the shrine maiden had so many roles it was a little unclear what her job was.

Regardless, she inhaled and worked to speak as calmly as possible.

“Pass this on to the diplomats.”

This is where we just have to bear with it, she thought before continuing.

“Even if the other nations and academies attack the Ariake and even if they continue their attack, do not stop them. We will defend ourselves here. ...What you all need to do is stop any unnecessary history recreation conflict being fought between the nations and academies of Oushuu, Kantou, and Sviet Rus. But do not stop any conflict with Musashi.”

So...

“Play your parts as diplomats even if they fire on the Musashi and the Ariake.”

Date Narumi sensed the noise and light of cannon fire as she continued fighting with her dress in the wind. The cannon fire did not just come from the Date clan. She could hear Mogami and Sviet Rus’s cannon fire in the distance, but the intensity of that noise and light was enough to tell just how seriously those two nations were taking this.

In her opinion, they were not holding back much at all.

In truth, only the primary members of a fleet could actually do damage to a structure as large as the Ariake. And when they did not know how the Musashi would react, they were forced to keep their distance.

...So they will naturally be firing with more intensity just to reach them in the first place.

Her ship’s data processing officer would be measuring the intervals between the other nations’ cannon blasts to measure the rapid-fire ability and durability of the cannons of their primary warships. But...

“The Musashi and Ariake are focusing on defense? Are they trying to show Oushuu and Sviet Rus that they have learned their lesson?”

She asked her question to the half-dragon looking to the south with a large forearm held over

his eyes.

“Learned their lesson? What do you mean by that, Date Narumi?”

“Why do you ask?”

“Judge.” The half-dragon nodded while still staring into the distance. “Are you saying you would strike someone you feel has already learned their lesson?”

“Well...”

Narumi trailed off and the half-dragon nodded again without taking his eyes off of the southern sky.

“We Catholics would strike them.”

“W-wait a second! That wasn’t supposed to be a moral lesson!?”

“What are you talking about? ...If someone strikes us on the cheek, Catholicism teaches us to turn the other cheek. By showing you have learned your lesson and by accepting the second strike, you learn something about your opponent.”

“You can learn something about your opponent like that?”

“You can.” The half-dragon nodded without facing her. “If they strike you again, you learn of the pain they feel by making it your own. And if they do not strike you again, you learn of their tolerance. That is what Catholicism teaches us. And to my clever eyes...”

He exhaled from all of his body’s exhaust ports and let his shoulders droop.

“This situation demonstrates just how anxious Oushuu and Sviet Rus are.”

“...”

Narumi hated that she could only judge that analysis as correct. They were being forced to face the massive presence that was P.A. Oda and most of their decisions were impromptu and reactionary.

Even though Musashi was the one being “struck”, they actually seemed to be viewing the rest of them more calmly than anyone else.

Narumi then realized that the half-dragon was not looking to the Ariake and the Musashi inside their stealth barrier.

...He’s looking at Hashiba Hidetsugu’s ship?

Trying to figure out why would be dangerous. Date's enemies and allies were clearly defined at the moment, so she had to remain silent.

And as she maintained her silence, the half-dragon nodded thrice.

"But that aside..."

"What?"

"Judge. ...Listen. Catholicism also tells us to have restraint. After all, if you strike someone too much and cross a certain line, they will apparently begin to enjoy it. What I'm saying is, you are the ones who will be in trouble if Musashi starts to enjoy this. So you should not take this too far. That would be what Masazumi wants. ...Amen."

"I have no idea what you were talking about for most of that, but we aren't going to stop attacking." Narumi breathed in and looked to the western sky. "Also, while we do have to make a powerful demonstration here, I would think Sviet Rus has to make the most powerful demonstration of all since they're already fighting P.A. Oda. If they take Hashiba too lightly, they could end up invaded all at once."

The light of cannon fire flew through the sky from the north, northwest, and west.

A few silhouettes were visible at the source of the lines extending from west to east.

They were the ships of the Sviet Rus fleet and the diplomatic ship from Musashi.

The courtyard portion of the Sviet Rus diplomatic ship was filled with summertime.

Festival stands, a wide open space, and a festival tower were built in that central courtyard, but...

"So basically, they're holding a shrine festival to celebrate our diplomatic visit. ...They even have a shrine, so it's quite well made."

When boarding, they had been told yukatas were the dress code, so Mitotsudaira wore one as she carried her silver chains case and looked around from the head of their group.

They were in the courtyard of the Sviet Rus diplomatic ship, the Fukushima Castle. The upper deck would normally cover the area like a ceiling, but the area had been transformed into a stage for the festival.

The people walking between the festival stands were the primarily demonic crew as well as their families. They were speaking with each other around the stands, playing in the water of

the shrine's large spring, and constructing the tower they would later dance around.

As Mitotsudaira observed them, her nose detected a mixture of many different seasonings.

...There isn't anything out of the ordinary around here.

"It's okay, my king. Meeting their representative here should not be a problem."

She turned back where the nudist wore a flesh-colored naked camouflage yukata. He nodded in acknowledgement, looked across the festival, and then tilted his head when he saw Horizon, Mitotsudaira, the 1st Special Duty Officer, and Mary.

"Are you all really not wearing anything under your yukatas?"

"Well," said Horizon as she crouched down and lifted the bottom of Mitotsudaira's yukata up to just below her stomach. "The latest trend seems to be wearing nothing but antiperspirant tights below in order to claim you are 'not wearing underwear'. Oh, and thank you for your cooperation."

"In a way, you're leaking our information! Our private information!"

"Calm down, calm down. I did the same thing because Master Tenzou said it was customary."

Mary lifted up her yukata to show them. She blushed as she did so.

"I'm glad I had Master Tenzou with me when choosing on the Ariake. Apparently a lot of people only wear this on the bottom."

"1st Special Duty Officer, I would like a word with you about a variety of things..."

Meanwhile, the surrounding ships fired on the Ariake again.

The people enjoying the festival looked up to the cannon fire and the light that scattered when it hit the wall to the east. Also...

"Tamayaaaa!"

...I feel like that isn't entirely accurate to the history recreation!

Even if they were firing on the Ariake, Mitotsudaira was not sure it was right to call this the Ariake Fireworks Festival. At any rate, Mary spoke as she looked to the east.

"Lady Masazumi said we had to bear with this, so that's our job here."

She smiled with the ends of her eyebrows lowered and Mitotsudaira could only agree.

“That’s all we can do when that’s the official policy we’ve been given. Even if that policy was only decided on this morning.”

But what are we going to do? she thought just before a voice reached them from the shrine.

“I haven’t seen any of you before. Let me get a look at you.”

本庄・繁長

It was a woman. Specifically, a demon woman with white skin. She must have come from the shrine spring where the children were playing in the water because she had a white swimsuit attached to her Sviet Rus hard point parts. She had a sword hanging from her coat and she walked toward them with her long gray hair flowing behind her.

Despite being wet and wearing sandals, she did not make any excess noise as she approached. That was why Mitotsudaira stepped in front of the others. She lowered her arm so she could open the silver chain case's lower cover at any time and she lowered her knees a little.

"Who are you?" she asked in place of bowing.

The slender woman crossed her arms and answered the question.

"I am Sviet Rus 3rd Special Duty Officer and Southeastern Supervisor Honjou Shigenaga. I apologize for this being so sudden, but..."

She snapped her right hand's fingers with her arms still crossed and the wind began to blow.

A transport ship to the right of the diplomatic ship began quickly accelerating toward the Ariake.

"Eh!?" said Mitotsudaira as Shigenaga nodded a few times.

"P.A. Oda's aerial ship attack on Magdeburg is not something Sviet Rus cannot emulate. I'm curious how the Ariake and Musashi will respond."

...Now they've done it!

Naruze realized what Sviet Rus was doing.

Sviet Rus was currently fighting P.A. Oda and they were being invaded from the west thanks to Novgorod more or less betraying them. If Hashiba's influence reached Kantou on their east, they would be conquered by the great nation of P.A. Oda from the east and west.

So as a performance for Hashiba, they were attacking the Musashi to demonstrate their allegiance.

...While also showing what they'll do to Hashiba if they carelessly try to invade.

By doing that, they could give a warning to P.A. Oda and Shibata's warriors invading from the west and as well as a warning to Novgorod, the floating city that had betrayed them.

Mal-Ga: “That makes the attack on Musashi a demonstration in three or four different ways for Sviet Rus. ...Masazumi, give us permission to attack. Just like the Ariake is defending against the enemy cannon fire, we can act as diplomats by ‘not stopping their actions’ but ‘stopping their attacks’, right?”

Vice President: “You can do it, can’t you?”

Mal-Ga: “I think you might be a better commander than glasses boy.”

“Right?” asked Naruze while holding her cheek out toward Margot as they lay down in midair facing each other. The other girl pecked at her lips like a bird. The surprise was stronger than the action itself, the soft sensation, or the sound.

“...Ah.”

“Heh heh. You can’t let your guard down, Ga-chan.”

Naruze smiled bitterly at that. This partner always chose the option that would surprise her, so Naruze softened her bitter smile but did not shirk her duties.

Something in the western sky was reflecting the sunlight. It was a Sviet Rus transport ship. Naruze judged it to be fifteen kilometers away and set the proper values in Weiss Fräulein’s navigation program. At the same time as Margot, she tilted Weiss Fräulein’s hull around and pointed it straight down.

She used the freefall to match the transport ship’s altitude.

“Here we go.”

The two Technohexen slid down toward the western sky.

“So that’s Zwei Fräulein.”

Two people on the ground watched the white and black paths in the sky.

They were both girls wearing M.H.R.R. girls uniforms without the coat.

They were Fukushima Masanori and Katou Kiyomasa.

They were on a small rocky mountain in the forests of southern Mito.

Fukushima placed a healing charm on Kiyomasa’s left arm.

“Kiyo-dono, thou should not force thyself too much while fighting.”

“Lady Fukushima... I would prefer it if you paid attention to what you’re doing while healing me.”

“Sorry. This is my first time seeing Kantou’s sky.”

A great sound rang through the sky. The white and black Technohexen had begun more intense acceleration. A ring of water vapor formed in the blue sky, the black one moved out ahead, and the white one followed. Kiyomasa sighed as she watched their paths.

“I wonder how Yoshiaki and Nagayasu would respond if they saw this.”

“Testament. Those two are always looking for an excuse to fly, but I think they would have a legitimate excuse if they saw that. Namely...defeating their opponents.”

“Yes, we must stop Musashi’s military domination.”

“Testament.” Fukushima nodded. “This sky, this land, this forest, this water, this air, this heat, and this chilly wind are all counting on us.”

She took a breath.

“Whether the Apocalypse can be stopped or not depends on us as the anti-Musashi unit.”

A moment later, additional noise came from the sky. The Technohexen had poured even more acceleration onto themselves.

Chapter 37: Wing Users in the Sky

第三十七章

『大空の翼使い達』



それは光に然り
それは闇に囁み
それは力に近き
配点（攻撃者）

It is a type of light

It bites at the darkness

It approaches strength

Point Allocation (Attacker)

Black and white lines travelled through the blue sky above the green earth.

They rode Schwarz Fräulein and Weiss Fräulein, specialized hulls provided by Edel Brocken. Schwarz Fräulein and Weiss Fräulein were pulled forward with excellent acceleration.

The wind that not even an atmospheric buffering spell could prevent washed over the white Technohexen as she sent out words using the crop mark frame Magie Figur she had drawn with her right hand. Her voice itself was drowned out by the wind, but the words still appeared in the speech bubbles.

Mal-Ga: “Margot! I can see them! They’re eight kilometers away!”

Gold Mar: “Judge! Let’s swap positions once we’re within five kilometers!”

Mal-Ga: “Judge! We’ll be making a turn, so switch over your turn settings!”

They had a single goal: stop the ship that Sviet Rus had sent toward the Ariake.

...And do it in a nondestructive way!

They would demonstrate that they could shoot down the ship, but they would intentionally avoid doing so.

They intended to destroy the rear thruster to knock it off course. After all...

...That will show that’s all we need to do to erase that threat! The transport ship attacks at Magdeburg happened at night and when the divine transmissions were out.

Mal-Ga: “But we’ll show them that we’re here now!”

Naruze upped her speed.

She had to hurry because Margot had not hesitated to accelerate in front of her. Naruze

desperately pursued her through the hole in the wind created by Schwarz Fräulein and the golden wings.

She could see the light created by the Schwarz Techno acceleration spell. Beyond that, she saw Margot's main wings stretching straight back and her skirt fluttering up in the wind.

Gold Mar: "Ga-chan, is it just me or are you forcing yourself to stick to that spot?"

Mal-Ga: "I can see every contour of your butt in those tights, so I'm only obeying my instincts!"

Gold Mar: "I'm glad to see you haven't changed at all. ...We're in range! That means..."

"Judge," replied Naruze as she pushed back the accelerator with the back of her thighs. She leaned forward and pursued Margot while making sure not to be blown away by the wind.

Mal-Ga: "Here we go, Margot!"

Gold Mar: "Well, I was actually thinking I should tell you to watch out. Look."

The color white passed by over Naruze's forward-leaning head.

...An ice shell!?

She assumed it had come from the Sviet Rus fleet, but she was wrong.

Mal-Ga: "It came from the transport ship!? It isn't unmanned!?"

Gold Mar: "There are no life signs onboard! So..."

Naruze understood. The enemy had predicted this counterattack. And...

Gold Mar: "Ga-chan! Their attack is coming! It's multi-stage!!"

With the Technohexen three kilometers away, thirty-two projectiles resembling white spears were launched from different parts of the approaching transport ship.

They were ice spears. The spears themselves were made from Orei Nero and the spell dissolved into them reacted.

"Orthodoxia: Attack Spell: Multi-Shell Split and Homing: Confirmed."

They each broke apart into eight different spears and an acceleration spell activated on the

back of each one. A moment later, they drew arcs through the sky as they flew straight toward something.

In the early summer sky, the many pillars of ice turned at sharp angles, let out a spray of light, and surfed through empty air.

Their targets were the two approaching Technohexen, but then a red light appeared on the sight device on the bow of the unmanned transport ship.

“Additional shells: Confirmed.”

More frozen multi-shell attacks were scattered about for a second and third stage.

The temperature difference created a white mist in the sky. Some of the ice pillars were caught in the wind, collided with each other, and shattered, but the unmanned ship did not care. The white ship continued scattering white spears through the sky as it flew straight toward the white and black Technohexen.

After forcing her way past Margot to move out front, Naruze saw it.

...Would you call this a white rain shower?

More than just a barrage or a barrier, a solid space of enemy projectiles appeared before her eyes wrapped in mist.

Represented in a line drawing, there would have been little white space and they would end up being drawn in black even if she tried to draw them white. That was how solidly the space was filled with enemy projectiles.

“Not bad. If all they have to do is fire a ton of multi-stage homing shells, a transport ship will work as well as a warship. It’s useful enough for resisting a short-term counterattack.”

Naruze felt she should complain. She felt she should curse and verbally abuse the enemy for doing this, but...

“Hah!”

She heard her own voice in the wind. She wrinkled her brow, but stared at her opponent and let out a roar, without knowing if she should twist her mouth into a smile or into a look of anger.

“Don’t underestimate Technohexen, Sviet Rus!!”

She opened the rail wings on either hip so they extended back on either side. The backs of her knees caught on the accelerator and she raised her butt.

“Watch this.”

She held Weiss Fräulein between her knees and forced the accelerator back.

She held down the device as it was buffeted by the wind and she cut forward through the sky.

She simply focused on that forward movement.

“Here I go!”

It sure is cold, thought Naruze.

The chill of the air felt like a premonition. There was no sound in her vicinity, she felt the softness of her body parting the air like water, and she saw the many lines of white ice approaching.

“Heh...heh.”

It almost looked like her entire field of vision turned white.

...It's just like a manuscript page before you've drawn anything.

Now, then. Where to begin? Where should I place the pencil tip to begin the initial roughs?

The top right, I suppose. But starting with the characters there would be too standard. I'll divide up the panels, of course.

This time, I should start with the background on the top right. I should keep the background dense on the right and thin it out toward the center to draw the eye leftward.

And looking to the left will bring you to the heroine's face. Then looking down from there will show the heroine walking this way, from the top to the bottom of the page. She'll be a bit of a dark girl who likes to avoid things.

But the heroine isn't looking this way. She's looking to the bottom right of the page. The mid-level panel will show a friend running up from behind the heroine.

That friend will be cheerful but will seem at home no matter where she goes. She'll be calling out to the heroine as she runs up. The sunlight will be shining this way from above her. That should give a nice sense of the season.

The panel frame will have a close up of the friend's face with a flower next to it. A white flower. A camellia would be nice and Far Eastern. And while linking that flower to the heroine, it can scatter some of its petals on the heroine's side to represent some slight unease.

If I were to plan the next page, it would have the heroine turning back toward the friend with a clear blue sky in the background.

No, maybe a ton of flowers would be better.

Well, I guess I'll go with that.

Mal-Ga: "I'm in combat range!"

As soon as the white Technohexen arrived within two kilometers of the transport ship, she ascended to the upper right.

She continuously fired four guided coin bullets while flying in a gradual ascending arc. The black Technohexen followed. Like a school of fish, the transport ship's homing shells increased their density on the upper right. But...

"Over here!!"

While Weiss Fräulein rose to the upper right, the white Technohexen was sticking her butt in that same direction as she fought to maintain control of the device, but then she forced her butt to the left. This pointed the white hull in that direction.

"...!"

She almost seemed to jump over to the upper left of the ship.

The enemy shells could not keep up. Their density was still focused on the upper right, so they quickly created arcs of pursuit.

But Naruze was already circling around below the ship. She dropped straight down in a gouging line and the pen tip on the back of the hull drew a guiding line.

"Wah."

But even using that guiding line, the speed-focused black Technohexen could not follow. As if dancing or bouncing through the air, she started pursuing the white Technohexen in a diagonal line from the upper right, but...

“Margot! Don’t force yourself over this way!! Keep going straight!!”

As the enemy shells resumed pursuing her again, the white Technohexen swung her body, but she was not changing direction. She pointed her back down and the bottom of her hull toward heaven.

“I can see you!”

She held the hull toward heaven as a shield and pointed the pen in her hand toward the pursuing enemy shells. As the pen tip raced through the air, it drew three-dimensional lines that reached all of the flying ice pillars.

“Herrlich!!”

Coin bullets launched from Weiss Fräulein as it took high-speed evasive action and flipped around.

The number of lines was the same as the number of destroyed ice pillars.

White flowers blossomed in midair and the white Technohexen made a shallow ascent as if to fly between the scattering light.

The boxy front of the transport ship released several beams of light.

“Ether cannons!!”

They flew in straight lines at first, but they did not maintain that straight path. They were homing versions. Light sprayed out as they took a winding path toward the black Technohexen who was following from a little behind, but...

“Could you be any more obvious!?”

The white Technohexen rapidly fired homing coin bullets toward the ether cannon beams approaching from behind her partner like sunlight.

However, she was not targeting the ether cannon light itself. She instead targeted the homing multi stage ice pillars also approaching the other girl. Those many ice spears were a means of attack, but at the same time...

“They’re what the ether cannons are tracking! It’s blatantly obvious if you look at the trajectories!”

Sure enough, the ether cannon blasts were flying in diagonal trajectories that more closely followed the ice shells than the black Technohexen herself.

The white Technohexen chose to avoid the shells pursuing her and focused instead on the ones pursuing her partner.

“Margot! Trust me!!”

She drew a straight guiding line to herself, so...

“Judge!!”

The black Technohexen flew straight to the white Technohexen without any fear.

The ether cannon light released from the ship like sunlight continued pursuing her, but that did not matter.

The white Technohexen fired. Her repeated shots overlapped, grew to a true rapid-fire, and repeatedly shattered the ice pillars still pursuing her partner.

White flowers burst in the sky and sounds of destruction blossomed.

The flowers were split apart time and again as the ether cannon light swept through the air, but...

“Herrlich!!”

She fired one last bullet to finish her drawing and that led to the conclusion.

The icy pursuers had vanished from behind the black Technohexen. As soon as only the rough wind and blowing mist remained, the ship’s ether cannon beams ended their winding pursuit. And...

“Ga-chan!”

The black Technohexen caught up to the white one as if leaping into her chest.

Without even looking back, the white Technohexen drew several lines around herself and smiled.

“C’mon, Margot. You need to come straight toward me.”

Her rapid-fire shattered all of the ice pillars remaining in the blue sky visible above the horizon.

The shattering white flowers colored the sky, but the black Technohexen smiled within the blossoming and scattering flowers.

“But Ga-chan, having your butt right in front of me is really distracting.”

“So now you know how I felt?”

“Judge!”

With that reply, the two blushing Technohexen accelerated. They ascended toward the transport ship they were just about to pass by.

They did not hold back on the speed and the white one pulled ahead due to her greater acceleration.

“Here we go!”

The black one moved forward to pass the white one.

Naito’s plan to intercept the transport ship was a simple one.

In order to load cargo from the top, transport ships barely had any armor there. So just as she passed by, she would force her trajectory up and around to fire on the engine division below the rear deck.

...I don’t know what we’ll do if they have armor on the top.

She decided to keep her thoughts positive. She saw transport ships flying and maneuvering on a daily basis aboard the Musashi, so her instincts told her this ship had nothing heavy on the top. So if she was to trust in and have confidence in herself here...

“Here goes!”

She flew up. She knew Naruze was following thanks to the movements of the wind she felt in her wings. She lit the five acceleration spells opened for Schwarz Fräulein’s mobility, but...

...Eh!?

She was confused.

The wind around her suddenly flowed downward like a massive muddy stream.

Before she could question why, she saw the answer up ahead.

The transport ship was turning.

It had been flying toward the Ariake, but it began a large roll as if to avoid their attack. Looking at it from the front, it would have been a clockwise roll. As the starboard side started moving up, the starboard deck turned away from Naito, as if to avoid exposing its back to her.

Also, its ether cannons began firing sweeping blasts through the air without even aiming.

The smell of the air roasting and the rumbling of wind reached her and she saw a giant glowing sword of power racing through the sky, but...

“Let’s go, Ga-chan.”

She simply accelerated as if to ascend through the rotation of the air.

“Oh, my...”

Kiyomasa watched the scene from a rocky hill in the forest.

As the transport ship rolled clockwise, the black Technohexen flew straight up. The black light shot up in a straight line as if to look down on the rolling ship.

But even Kiyomasa could tell the black Technohexen’s trajectory was a reckless one.

...She’s going to be launched straight up!

The black flight device was built with a focus on high speeds and its current speed was simply too high.

But another color showed up to support the black: white. The white Technohexen seemed to pass below the black one.

The white Technohexen’s flight device was more focused on acceleration and it swept across the rotating ship’s armor in a grazing trajectory. The line of light passed right over the ship as if peeling an apple or sweeping everything away. Meanwhile, she drew something.

It was a guiding line to keep her black partner from leaving the ship. It was hand-drawn and it did not reach the black Technohexen overhead, but...

“Is that...?”

The white Technohexen opened a Magie Figur with the hand not holding the pen. As soon as she placed her hand on it, an evenly-spaced grid grew from her line and one portion hopped upwards like a whip.

She had applied a transformation to the line using a program.

The wavy guiding line grasped the center of the black Technohexen's hull as she nearly strayed off course.

From there, a circus began. Because she was held by the guiding line, the black Technohexen revolved around the ship without losing any of her speed.

By sliding the back of her hull forward as if falling back on her butt, her hull performed a reversing loop.

The hull spun around like that, but the black Technohexen herself did something else. She let go of the hull and did not let herself rotate.

"Is she is preparing to fire!?" guessed Fukushima next to Kiyomasa.

That was exactly what happened.

In the blowing wind, the rear thruster of the rotating black hull pointed upwards. The black Technohexen threw five long rolls of hundred-yen coins that likely had about five thousand yen each.

Fukushima had been sitting next to Kiyomasa and healing her, but her hands had stopped.

Her eyes were focused on the white and black Technohexen who accelerated as they began to disappear on the other side of the rolling ship. The white one skimmed just around the ship, pulling the black one as she did. The black one held the rotating black hull below her arm and aimed the rear thruster like a cannon.

...Herrlich.

In place of a trigger, she grabbed the accelerator with one hand.

The Technohexen finally moved out of sight beyond the rolling ship.

A moment later, the ship transformed as it was passing overhead.

The rear hull swelled out as if it were filling with water. The hardened wood armor split and changed shape due to the internal pressure. That pressure could find no path out, so it blew to the front and upwards.

A great rumbling soon followed.

Next, something exploded from the unseen upper deck and into the sky beyond the ship.

“Oh, my!”

It was the destruction of the internal engine, surrounded by a white water vapor explosion.

The engine division below the rear deck had likely exploded and its shockwave had decorated the sky. With the sound of the air being torn into and split apart, the ship's path dropped down and the aft end swayed downward.

It was falling.

But Fukushima suddenly spoke up.

“It would be quite rude of them to leave it like this! ...If it falls, it will cause damage!”

As she asked what they would do, Fukushima squeezed Kiyomasa's arm without noticing. She was probably just excited, but since it was on the verge of breaking the arm, Kiyomasa moved the arm.

“_____”

“Nh? What is it, Kiyo-dono!? Is this exciting thee as much as it is me!?”

“No, um, w-wait. m-my arm, my arm.”

Fukushima finally seemed to catch on. She quickly let go, descended to the bottom of the rocky hill using Headfirst Fall, and prostrated herself on the ground.

“I-I am so very sorry! I very nearly harmed that precious body that could likely pull off the Giant Breasts Defense!”

...She would be fine if it wasn't for things like this. ...And what was that last thing she said?

The two of them were the young leaders of the Ten Spears, so she wished Fukushima could calm down a little.

But just as she was going to tell the girl not to worry about it...

...The sky.

She felt something like a chill in the sky, as if something were being removed.

She heard a single light sound like a thin sheet of metal being struck, but it had reached her from a distant part of the sky.

She looked up to the falling transport ship and saw the black and white Technohexen returning to the Musashi, but the sound had not come from the two of them.

A great power had pierced through the falling ship from front to back.

“A physical shell!?”

The tremor of an explosive blast filled the sky, followed by the waves of light caused by red flames and scattering ether.

The transport ship had exploded.

The ship shot down in the Technohexen attack had been destroyed to prevent it from falling any further.

“I’m guessing that was a physical shell with a breaking spell added on. Those have an effective range of around ten kilometers and it looks like it was enough to break the ship’s keel. I’m guessing they thought destroying most of it with a spell was far better than letting that great mass fall and cause damage on the surface.”

In the floating festival, Shigenaga commented on the outcome as she viewed it through an Orthodox *sankt okno* displaying a magnified image.

As she watched, a giant silhouette appeared in the eastern sky.

“So the Ariake is showing itself. ...Quite an extraordinary view for our festival sky.”

Light raced through the sky like sea spray and a white surface came into view from south to north.

It was the Ariake.

That specialized dock for the Musashi was a giant mass of metal that looked something like a flat and thick cloud, but a single spot of red was visible on top. It was the god of war belonging to Musashi’s 6th Special Duty Officer.

...Isn’t that the Something-Or-Other Suzaku?

A Tres Españan aerial god of war’s wings were equipped on its back, but it was currently lying flat on the Ariake’s upper armor. As it did so, it was holding something and aiming it this way.

“So they modified an English-style ship’s gun into a god of war sniper cannon, did they? The

English-style ones really are a little too accurate.”

Tenzou viewed the divine transmission from Naomasa.

Smoking Girl: “I might not be a match for Asama-chi, but I can manage well enough with sniping spells. All of the recoil and heat is handled by the wings on the back, so jams can be a real pain in the ass, though.”

“Also,” she added.

Smoking Girl: “There are a few others who can use these things. Can you see them?”

“Judge,” confirmed Tenzou.

The sign frame he was viewing with Mary showed a unit of a few heavy, middle, and light gods of war aiming a total of eight sniper cannons in various directions.

Naito and Naruze’s presence was one way they were warning the three nations, but also...

...We’re showing that we can accurately locate so many enemies.

Those sniping positions could not be taken immediately.

The Ariake had removed its stealth barrier not just to show off the god of war sniper unit, but also to show they could target the enemy even from inside the stealth barrier.

The Ariake had essentially revealed the source of the attack to the enemy. Even with the sniper cannons, they had chosen to harm their own position to harm the enemy.

The Ariake’s Kantou IZUMO representative Mishina Shouichi was speaking in another window inside the sign frame.

481: “How about that!? How about that, dad!? Jizuri Suzaku’s sniper cannon is pretty cool, ain’t it!? It’s still using the main barrel and hasn’t even expanded its full barrel, and it’s already this cool! Isn’t it just plain adorable!?”

Mr. Mecha: “What? Are you stupid? If you’re gonna have the Suzaku fire, you’ve gotta start with shooting a ton of homing beams from the ends of the spiky wings. Don’t act like you’re all-that after using a long gun instead of the wings, you amateur.”

481: “You’re exactly the kind of adult I hate! You always act like you know what you’re talking about!!”

Such a fulfilling relationship between father-in-law and son-in-law, thought Tenzou as Shigenaga looked his way.

“Using gods of war for movable cannons is a decent idea. Each of the Musashi’s ships can move independently and can cruise at high speeds, so I can see why you would need cannons that can move on a moment’s notice. When using them for real, do you have sniping stations where they can fire while at least kneeling?”

Everyone looked Tenzou’s way when she asked that, so it looked like they wanted him to respond.

...Well, it probably would be best for me to respond since she can’t see my expression.

The nudist acted like being a nudist was his job, Horizon would begin using her Horizon Logic, Mitotsudaira was likely still full of energy after the battle in Mito, and he would feel bad leaving this to Mary.

So he quickly answered “judge”. He had no real reason to actually answer Shigenaga’s question, so he decided to change the subject.

“How did you like that physical shell? Nice, wasn’t it? Those are the true romance of men.”

“Oh?” said Shigenaga as she raised the right corner of her mouth and nodded.

When she crosses her arms, her breasts look quite large, but even that trick doesn’t bring her anywhere close to Mary-dono, he noted as she pointed westward with her chin.

“Did you shoot down that ship in response to the threat of an enemy ship containing a dragon line reactor, just like during the fall of K.P.A. Italia?”

“Does Sviet Rus view the dragon line reactors as a threat?”

Tenzou asked while realizing he was making a precarious tightrope walk. Shigenaga did not nod, but she did smile a little.

“Long ago, a ley line reactor went out of control in Sviet Rus land and caused wide-scale destruction. That land still exists as a Harmonic Territory, but it remains a ‘man-eating land’ where mysterious phenomena occur and it fills with ether mist on moonlit nights. Shadows of aerial ships, sounds of war, and human cries fill that land.”

“Well...”

Tenzou had heard rumors of that. As a history recreation interpretation, the event had officially “never happened”, but that was just how it was.

At any rate, Shigenaga nodded in front of him.

“Testament. There are likely distortions and misunderstandings introduced as the story was passed down, but before the Harmonic Unification War, a civil war broke out in Old Moscow as a part of the history recreation. Apparently, that led to the city’s annihilation. That is why the Kasuga Gora Kremlin has functioned as Moscow ever since the Harmonic Unification War.”

Tenzou listened to Shigenaga.

“My mother was one of the returnees...that is, one of the people who returned to the real world from the Harmonic Territories. As the front-line defender here, I believe I understand just how important runaway ley line reactors are to Sviet Rus.”

“In that case,” said Tenzou while raising his right index finger as if indicating their selling point here. “With us around, you do not need to worry about transport ship attacks like that.”

“What? Make no mistake here. Even Sviet Rus can intercept a ship like that. We just need a few average or higher flight-capable demons and someone who can use a penetration spell.”

Mal-Ga: “The ninja’s crappy sales pitch just wasted all of our efforts out here. Sob...”

10ZO: “You’re willing to pretend to cry if it means making fun of me!?”

Marube-ya: “Anyway, you can’t come back until you make up for what we lost there.”

Fine then, thought Tenzou as he raised his right hand again.

“Then how about this?”

“About what?”

He worked at cheerfully responding to Shigenaga’s question.

“Since both Sviet Rus and we can at least defend against transport ship attacks, we know we both understand the threat that dragon line reactors pose. And in northern Kantou, Sviet Rus is in the west and we are in the east, so with the two of us there, we can reduce Hashiba’s influence and power in Oushuu. Isn’t that right?”

Did that do it? he wondered as he looked her way.

...Huh?

Shigenaga had narrowed her eyes sharply.

“We cannot leave the protection of Oushuu to you.” She had wiped all expression from her face. “Someone else is much better suited to that role and we have promised to protect the west until they return. So even if you have shown your strength by intercepting that transport ship, you have not earned any more points than that.”

She was quite definitive and she turned to the side with a snort.

She had utterly rejected them.

Asama: “I had a feeling that would happen... Maybe Tenzou-kun used up all his diplomacy skill back in England.”

Azuma: “Oh, sorry. I’m just getting some snacks for ???, so continue on without me.”

Worshipper: “Welcome! Welcome, Tenzou-kun! You’re one of us now!!”

10ZO: “I had a feeling you would react like this, but you didn’t actually have to do it! But you know what? I don’t care! I’m solidly on the Mary-dono route, so I know I made the right decision here!!”

Vice President: “Don’t screw up our diplomacy because you don’t care!”

Uqui: “Heh heh heh. There’s a world of difference between that and my definite progress on the elder sister route.”

They were the same as always, but then Shigenaga sighed and turned back toward him.

“But what will you do, Musashi? We will continue firing, you know? The three nations are still approaching the Ariake, so the force of our bombardment will only grow. And...”

Smoking Girl: “Urquiaga! Check what they’re doing there! The cannon fire from Date is growing fixated!”

...Growing fixated!?

The trajectories of the shells were growing simpler. That made it easier for the Ariake to defend, but it also meant Date could focus on doing something else. And then Urquiaga sent a divine transmission back.

Uqui: “They seem to be launching gods of war toward the Ariake. Ones capable of aerial combat.”

“Yes.” Shigenaga smiled. “That would be the Date clan’s prized Dragon Knights made up of

anti-ship gods of war.”

But that was not all. A sign frame opened with an “emergency” designation. It was a warning from the Musashi.

Musashino: “Something is happening on the Jurakudai in the south! Someone has appeared on the bow deck!”

It was...

Musashino: “Someone thought to be Hashiba Hidetsugu-sama has come out!! Over.”

“Hashiba’s nephew? They let someone that important out on the front lines?”

Naruze had returned to the sky above the Ariake and she was using a Magie Figur to view the information from the Musashi’s bridge.

The Jurakudai approaching from the south was drawn in the crop mark frame, but as the panels advanced, it zoomed in and a boy could be seen standing on the bow.

The boy with long black hair stood weakly with the blue sky in the background. He looked skinny, but his most noticeable feature was the dragon horn growing from the left of his head above his gentle eyebrows.

Margot narrowed her eyes when she saw it.

“That’s Hashiba Hidetsugu? He’s a dragon-man? Are you sure this isn’t cosplay?”

“Judge. I think it’s a real horn. But that isn’t all. You can see that, can’t you?”

Naruze pointed at the boy in the Magie Figur.

He stood on the Jurakudai’s bow, but the ship’s bridge was visible through him.

She clicked her tongue at the fact that he was transparent.

“He’s a ghost. ...In other words, he still has some kind of regret, so he’s sticking around in this world to fulfill whatever it is. This isn’t good.”

“Judge. But as Technohexen, we might not be the best ones to say this isn’t good.”

“True.”

As Naruze smiled bitterly, something else occurred on the Magie Figur footage. A girl stepped up alongside the dragon horn boy. She had long ears.

...A long-lived?

No, her ears were covered in fur. She was a nearly humanoid half-fox girl. And...

“Another ghost...”

But that was not all. Yet another person arrived behind the two of them.

It was a tall woman in a P.A. Oda uniform with her hair worn up.

“Musashi. It would seem you can see us from there. In that case, we will hold Lord Hidetsugu and Lady Komahime’s greeting here.”

A dog-like Mouse appeared on her shoulder. Naruze’s eyebrows rose when she noticed the number “2” stitched on the woman’s uniform.



丹羽・長秀

羽柴・秀次

駒姫

“Don’t tell me... Is that #2 of P.A. Oda’s Six Heavenly Demon Army!?”

The woman with the Mouse answered that question with a smile.

“I am Niwa Nagahide, P.A. Oda’s 3rd Special Duty Officer as well as #2 of the Six Heavenly Demon Army and the Five Great Peaks.”

Naruze’s eyebrows rose further when she heard Niwa’s name.

“Niwa Nagahide was in charge of constructing Azuchi Castle, right? Is that why she’s here?”

“Ohh... I always thought that name was pronounced Tanba.”

“Everyone does at first, Margot.”

Meanwhile, Niwa spread her sleeveless arms in the Magie Figur. Those arms supported the two ghosts standing in front of her.

When the fox-eared girl gave her a troubled look, Niwa smiled back.

“This girl is...Lady Mogami Komahime.”

She then looked to the motionless dragon horn boy whose eyes remained closed.

“And this is Hashiba’s nephew...Lord Hashiba Hidetsugu.”

She continued speaking while standing back up and narrowing her eyes northward, toward the Ariake.

“Lady Komahime recently had a rushed marriage as Lord Hidetsugu’s concubine and the Jurakudai is here so that she might greet Mogami. Lady Komahime and Lord Hidetsugu faced suicide together in their Testament descriptions. ...Nations and academies, try not to do anything careless.”

The cannon fire continued and Niwa spoke over the din.

“Now, please continue the festivities.”

Chapter 38: Fox of the Heavenly Castle

第三十八章

『天城の狐』



笑い
踊り
騙す先は
他人か自分か
配点 (いい空気)

After laughing

Dancing

And deceiving

Is it someone else or you?

Point Allocation (A Nice Atmosphere)

As soon as Niwa appeared, the Date fleet accelerated toward the Musashi.

Suzu sensed it from the tilting energy below her feet rather than from the wind.

She more or less knew why they were speeding up.

...The gods of war? It's a big deal...when they're...far away.

Earlier, Date Narumi had said as much about attacking the Ariake with their gods of war.

Naomasa-san and her friends in the engine division seemed to be having some fun with cannons on the Ariake, but it had to be a big deal to put the gods of war in harm's way. If they broke, they had to be fixed and that would take a lot of time and money. And fighting back could hurt the Date people, and that would be a different sort of problem.

...Masazumi called it...a p-political? Political problem. So...

Bell: "Naomasa-san. ...P-protect the...Ariake."

Smoking Girl: "Hm? We'll be fine! We're all skilled and we're excellent shots! If they show up, we'll just shoot them all. And our people have been building up a bit of stress lately, so if the enemy lands here, they'll get all worked up and intercept them. Hey, everyone! The Acting Captain just ordered us to protect the Ariake with our lives!"

Boys: "Judge! We'll work ourselves to death!!"

...Eh?

Where had she gone wrong? Suzu did not know, but she could tell they were fired up. She quickly tried to extinguish that fire.

Bell: "I-I didn't mean it...I-like that?"

Smoking Girl: “Eh? Oh, I gotcha, I gotcha. ...Hey, everyone! The Acting Captain has a complaint! She doesn’t want you to die; she wants you to survive!”

Boys: “Judge! We’ll make sure we’re alive and well even if the Ariake burns down around us!!”

...*Ehhh?*

Suzu felt that was half right, but would it make her an overachiever to try to get the whole thing right?

“Umm,” she hesitated.

Bell: “D-don’t hurt...e-each other...okay?”

Smoking Girl: Hey, everyone. The Acting Captain just sent you some kind words. Take a look at this reply.”

Suzu hoped they would understand if they saw her reply for themselves.

Light GoW 3: “Hey, I think Suzu-san’s right. We might’ve been hurting each other here.”

Mid GoW 7: “Yeah. We’re always blaming each other when there’s insufficient power or getting into fights over unreturned porn mags and mistakes in the shift schedule. ...We really are hurting each other.”

Light GoW 5: “Maybe people really can understand each other. ...Okay, let’s work together as one to intercept Date and revive the engine division!”

Smoking Girl: “You’re amazing, Suzu. I was worried about everyone’s teamwork since our exhaustion’s about at its peak, but you really brought them all together.”

Suzu felt like apologizing for everything, but as she sweated in her heart, a large form rose from the rear deck of a large neighboring ship.

...*A dragon?*

She perceived it as a humanoid dragon. Yoshiyasu’s Righteousness was a humanoid dog, so this was probably just as powerful. She hoped this would not lead to anything bad, but she did not go beyond hoping because she had a feeling the damage would only spread if she said something. But...

“Musashi Diplomat, I hope you are prepared.”

Date Narumi faced Suzu while holding down her skirt.

“I wish to see how Musashi will defend the Ariake against these twelve.”

Narumi sighed inside her heart.

...What has me so worn out?

This was the front line. She had a goal to aim for and she was prepared to accomplish it, so she only needed to do so. That was how the Chancellor's Officers worked.

...We are not purely Far Eastern.

She heard that the Sibir people with a provisional rule over Oushuu had originally been mostly Far Eastern. When the Harmonic Divine States had been made, most of their ancestors had moved to Sibir in the northern Harmonic Divine States.

That had been a frigid land. It had little sunlight and snow was a constant sight. Even now, the countless large Harmonic Territories covering Oushuu contained deep snow and that was where they lived.

She had heard a number of theories as to why their ancestors had moved to the Harmonic Divine States, but every theory agreed that there had been discord with the Shinto and Testament forces among the mainlanders.

The skills to survive in the frozen land waiting for them after the move could be seen in the underground construction techniques used for Sendai Castle and in the gods of wars modeled after the wild mechanical dragons that could survive even in that cold. Also...

“The Dragon God's protection...”

She muttered those words while staring straight at Musashi's diplomat.

“We did warn you. If you try to approach us and monitor us, we will simply reject you. ...So how about it?”

“How about...what?”

“Testament.” Narumi nodded. “If you leave now, never return to Oushuu, give up on the history recreation, and remain in the Mito area, we will end our attack and even act as an intermediary to help you find peace with Hashiba.”

“No.”

The girl replied immediately. It almost felt like speaking with a child, but that was not it.

Thinking that would be selling the girl short. After all...

“We have something we need to do.”

“And what is that?”

“A promise.”

The diplomat fell silent as if that was enough of an answer.

Narumi could tell there was conviction behind the words. She trusted in those words, so they were more than just reflexive resistance. Threatening her, attacking her, and attempting to persuade her would not change them. They sounded like words she would continue speaking as long as she remained “here”, no matter what anyone did.

It was a frightening thought. It was not that Narumi’s suggestion itself was unacceptable to her. They had a promise to uphold and the suggestion was unacceptable because it did not fit with that promise.

That was troublesome.

It came as the result of her connection to someone else and it was something she had decided for herself rather than given into. In that case, that decision would not waver. However, reality continued on despite that willpower, so...

“The gods of war are heading out.”

Light filled the base of the catapult lane on the rear deck. A launching spell mechanism had activated. The stack of sign frames for weight-bearing spells gradually broke down to zero.

“_____”

And they left.

The first god of war was the standard-bearer. It was a blue god of war and the whistle attached to the flag sounded loudly as it flew.

People call that the dragon’s whistle, thought Narumi.

As the whistle’s tone filled the air, four wings spread out to catch that air and they flapped for a quick ascent. The god of war unit was letting the other two nations know they were heading out.

Narumi spotted almost excessive armor on the front of the ascending god of war.

...I'm glad Oniniwa-san isn't reckless.

She then looked to the half-dragon who was staring up into the sky with a thoughtful hand on his chin.

"I see you aren't trying to stop them. That's a total of twelve gods of war on their way to the Ariake, you know?"

"It is not our job to stop an attack on the Ariake. The twelve gods of war are their problem. We came here for a reason. Send out your elder sister; nothing else concerns me."

"Did you...just let something slip there?"

"You must be hearing things. El. God enjoys subliminal messages. Der. When speaking with a servant of god such as myself – Sis – I expect you will gradually begin to feel the same. Ter."

"I think you're going to drive me insane, so I should probably go ahead and ask. ...How can a supposed servant of god continue to speak down to us when we are attacking your comrades with our cannons and gods of war?"

"Why do you take such issue with my mention of god?"

"Testament," replied Narumi. "Because I feel no freedom in reality."

"If your dreams are the only thing you view as freedom, then you can only ever obtain it while asleep."

"I see you holy men enjoy your wordplay."

"Of course we do." The half-dragon sighed. "Holy men are those that speak of god, talk of freedom and benevolence, and encourage cooperation, mercy, and peace. ...You should count yourself lucky all we have are words. If we took action, a great war would break out. In other words, the world is peaceful only because we holy men are currently restricting ourselves to mere words. After all, if we act carelessly, we could part the sea or bring people back from the dead. You need to understand these things, woman. Now, will you be sending out that elder sister? Hm?"

"W-wait! Enough nonsense!"

Narumi watched the second god of war take off and pointed to it.

"Quit changing the subject and answer me! The Ariake truly is being fired on as well as attacked by gods of war. And we truly no longer wish for Matsudaira's future and are looking

to Hashiba's guidance instead! What do you have to say about that reality!?"

"Nothing at all. Catholicism does not teach us to be critics of reality. Listen. Thou shalt not be a critic. ...And thou shalt not attempt to conquer the Testament or reality. Those are the teachings of Catholicism and the other religions." The half-dragon remained entirely composed. "We were sent here with a certain duty and others will handle what that duty does not cover. That is our 'weapon' against those who would conquer reality."

"Then..."

Not even Narumi knew what irritated her so much about this, but she swung her hand down and shouted at him.

"Then what do you think you can change about this reality...about this situation!?"

As soon as her words reverberated through the sky, something happened.

The god of war sliding down the catapult lane doubled over and was knocked into the air.

Narumi saw one of their gods of war knocked into the sky high overhead.

It was hit, she thought. By a secondary cannon class shell. It must not have had any divine protection, so we overlooked it among all the ether cannon blasts.

But it had been too sudden to immediately determine where it had come from.

...The Musashi!?

No, that was too far away. And the god of war had doubled over to the side, so it had come from the west. Someone was making a gentle approach from there.

"Mogami!"

What is going on? wondered Masazumi with widened eyes.

She had honestly been planning to request that Mogami obeyed the history recreation.

...I was going to ask that they follow the Testament descriptions by attacking Date and Sviat Rus.

Mogami was currently not at war, but that did not mesh with the history recreation. She had

meant to make waves here by pointing that out, but...

“Why?”

“Heh heh. Silly politician, asking ‘why’ of reality is like admitting you live in your own dreams. Reality is about the ‘what’. The parts beyond yourself matter more.”

Masazumi could not help but agree, so she immediately erased the disbelief in her heart. This was actually happening. It was reality.

Under Hashiba’s watchful eye, the three nations should have been firing on the Ariake, but Mogami had strayed from that. Mogami’s Chancellor and Student Council President had to have commanded that.

“Mogami Yoshiaki!”

A divine transmission from Naruze arrived with a hand-drawn map.

Mal-Ga: “Mogami has begun firing on Sviet Rus too! ...And they’re returning fire!”

The three-hull Yamagata Castle was the Mogami clan’s flagship and wings opened out from the two hulls out front.

The opening structure produced metallic noises at regular intervals as it pushed out devices that activated torii-style defense spells. Each one was a twenty meter upside-down torii-style metal panel. Seven of them covered the five hundred meter length on either side of the ship and they were wrapped in bluish-white light.

People in yellow-dyed Russian uniforms ran across the ship. They were attaching shimenawa-style conductive cables to various places and then raising their hand.

“Connected!”

With that word, ether barriers shaped like upside-down torii surrounded the Yamagata Castle.

A moment later, an explosion of light collided with those barriers.

The barriers appeared in triple layers and shook as they endured the impact. Fragments of light scattered through the air.

That single ether cannon blast had not come from Date in the east. It had come from the west. Specifically from Honjou Shigenaga’s Sviet Rus ship.

A second and third shot arrived and hit. Noise filled the sky, clouds scattered, and explosive fragments of light burst across the sky both horizontally and vertically. But by then, most of the other Mogami ships had moved below the Yamagata Castle, they had switched all their defenses to the side facing the enemy, and they produced their barriers.

Then return fire came from Date as well.

The first shot hit while the second and third missed. They must have used that first shot to calibrate their aim because a rapid series of shots came along almost that same trajectory.

The Yamagata Castle bathed in glowing spray from the ether cannon blasts arriving from the left and right.

Countless flowers of light danced through the windy sky like cherry blossoms. The sounds of impact sounded like the beating of a drum and the ship shook violently despite its great size. Several of the defense barriers shattered and were remade, but...

“Ka ha ha!”

A color danced atop the Yamagata Castle’s bridge as the light washed over it.

It was a woman.

She wore a white shirt with no shoulders to the sleeves and fox-brown side skirts. She and her colors spun in time to the ship’s vibration.

She used her toes and heels to turn her body and twist her waist while her light brown hair and her ears covered in white fur fluttered in the wind. The pressure of the blowing wind rang the bells attached to her ears.

“Keh.”

With that single loud syllable, she reached into her sleeves and pulled out folding fans that measured more than a meter long. When she spread the fans out, there was no paper between the slats. They were actually fan-shaped torii-style sign frames and they were linked to the Yamagata Castle’s cannon control spells.

“Connection: confirmed”

As she danced and waved the two fans, the Yamagata castle produced noise and fire.

She was returning fire against Sviet Rus and Date to the left and right. The cannon fire matched her dance.

“Ka ha!”

The sounds overlapped.

“Ha ha ha! Wretched residents of history! Pilgrims fated to travel the proper path! Sharp-eyed ones who lovingly polish your shackles and follow the end of the chain that binds you!”

The woman waved her arms, instructing the cannons along either wing to fire from front to back.

“It is laughably wretched how you fall into the trap of merely obeying as someone calls you toward that proper path!”

The cannon fire raced across the sky like a wave and then picked up speed.

Honjou Shigenaga’s fleet and the Date fleet had both entered effective firing range.

As the cannon fire suddenly began, the festival aboard Shigenaga’s diplomatic ship ground to a halt and Mitotsudaira immediately chose to protect those from Musashi. She sent silver chains from her wrists to crawl along the ground and surround everyone behind her.

Now that she was prepared to act if something happened, she tilted her head.

“Now, what is the meaning of this?”

This doesn’t qualify as an emergency just yet, she told herself while looking to Shigenaga.

Shigenaga contacted a few people to fulfill her role as commander and selected a few prearranged patterns before opening a *sankt okno* in front of her. It displayed...

...*A werefox*.

Just like Mitotsudaira, that was a transformation-type race. In this woman’s case, she could make a beast transformation into a fox. A werefox’s conditions for transformation were not as strict as a werewolf’s and the fox was more like their real form, so the excitement of this werefox’s dance had led her fox ears and tails to appear from within her hair and from the rear of her clothing.

She had nine tails, meaning she was a great fox. Which meant...

“What is the meaning of this!?”

Shigenaga glanced over at Mitotsudaira as she shouted to the werefox in the sign frame.

“Mogami Yoshiaki! Do you not wish for stability in Oushuu!?”

Mogami Yoshiaki laughed into the sky before responding to Honjou Shigenaga.

“How wretched.”

She spread her fangs, aimed forward, and swept her arms and fingertips around to trigger more cannon fire. She felt the arriving impacts as vibrations in the air and she spun her body to switch between managing the left and right sides. The wind swept the sweat from her brow.

“Wretched Oushuu...do you truly not understand?”

“Are you referring to Hashiba!?”

When Shigenaga roared her question on the sign frame, Yoshiaki bent her body and her back swelled out.

“Ha ha!”

She laughed. And after that human laugh, she leaned back, split her crescent moon of a mouth as if to devour the sky, and released a series of delighted “keh” sounds while she waved the cannon fans with her entire body.

“Keh hah!”

She raised her voice as she started firing her own shells into the enemy’s arriving shells.

“Is that all you have, Honjou Shigenaga!? And you wish to name yourself the one to decorate the end of Oushuu!?”

“Damn you!”

As she attempted to devour the sky, Yoshiaki responded to Shigenaga’s sign frame with her eyes. They bent in a smile and twisted over toward Shigenaga.

She looked down at Shigenaga with a gaze that seemed to swallow one up more than see through them.

“How wretched, Honjou Shigenaga. ...Can you wait no longer as you blame Hashiba for your failure to keep your promise? If so...”

Yoshiaki narrowed her eyes further and formed a small smile on her lips.

“If so, you have set foot on my superficial path down to hell.”

Suddenly, a shadow passed by overhead.

It was a god of war.

Oh? thought Yoshiaki as she spun her body.

One god of war passed by overhead and two more were following in the distance.

The Date gods of war had left to attack Musashi, but they must have decided this was the more immediate threat.

...I'm betting that was Oniniwa's decision, but he knows me too well to make an actual attack.

But the first god of war was clearly on a firing trajectory. The rifle below its right arm was aimed straight ahead as it flew in a line from the stern to the bow.



最上・義光

This was no mere warning, so this would be outside of Oniniwa's instructions. This was most likely a novice pilot.

"Did they stray from their instructions in order to sever the bond between Date and Mogami? Ha ha! Those who rush make mistakes, but it does make for a nice example of temporary justice!"

Yoshiaki threw both fans high into the air and faced the approaching god of war as the light of the cannon blasts washed over her from either side.

"Treat your own with more care, young one."

She pulled a sword from within her left side skirt. It was an old eighty-centimeter sword with no real decorations.

However, she placed her palm vertically along the back of the gently curving blade.

"Look back, Onikiri."

Something was immediately released from Onikiri's blade: memories.

A distance of 1200 meters would only take just over three seconds for a flying god of war, so the lead attacker knew he had won.

He would fire on Yoshiaki.

Oniniwa had forbidden it, but he had to do this if he had a chance.

After all, the Testament descriptions said Mogami Yoshiaki was Date Masamune's uncle and yet constantly harassed Date Masamune and others in Date territory while attempting to expand Mogami territory to the east.

If he could attack her, he had to do it. Oniniwa had said to avoid making an attack because she could not be caught off guard, but even if he was right...

"It'll only mean my own defeat!!"

As soon as he arrived within five hundred meters, he felt like he was receiving cannon fire from either side and flew alone along Yamagata Castle. He readied his rifle and aimed an auto-tracking spell round at her.

"...Eh?"

He suddenly felt something even while combined with the god of war.

It almost felt like...

...*Who is that?*

Like someone was slipping through him from front to back.

Then he saw something up ahead.

...*Is that...?*

It was a video, but it was not coming through the god of war's sight devices or as data from his fellow pilots.

It was his own memories.

The footage rapidly raced from the past to the present and it slowed down when a few different faces were shown.

Wait, he thought. *What is this?*

Each time the video slowed, it showed the face of a family member, a friend, or a comrade. It seemed to be thoroughly checking over each face.

"Is this searching for someone!?"

Then he heard a voice.

"I believe I will take these."

A moment later, the attacker heard a scream.

...*Eh?*

It was a scream of both anguish and surprise, but it was not alone.

It came from his fellow pilots. It came from all of the new pilots his own age on the battlefield – including the two following behind him.

"_____!?"

As their screams arrived via divine transmission, flowers blossomed in various parts of the sky.

The fellow pilots flying toward Musashi or with him were sliced apart before colliding with the air. White water vapor scattered as eight gods of war exploded in exactly the same way.

The damage was not fatal, but the image of them colliding with the air and exploding told him just how much damage they had taken.

They would be far from unharmed, but at the same time...

...Why wasn't I hit!?

As soon as he wondered that, his vision warned him of danger. Yoshiaki was only one hundred meters away now. She had returned the sword to her side skirt and she raised her arms.

The cannon control fans fell into her hands and she turned to face him.

“Kaboom.”

Date Narumi saw it happen.

When Yoshiaki pointed her fan at it, the flying god of war curled up in a ball. It looked like a crying baby, but it was an unthinkable action on the battlefield.

“She got us...”

But even as Date fired on the Yamagata Castle and Mogami fired back...

...They aren't firing on that god of war.

The god of war that had fallen victim to Onikiri decelerated in its curled up state. It passed through the valley of incoming and outgoing cannon fire and then entered a downward trajectory. It almost seemed to have fallen, but it was a slow and steady path to the ground.

The pilot had almost certainly lost consciousness. He likely had no idea what had happened yet was overcome by fear at that proclamation of death.

The half-dragon seemed just as confused and tilted his head.

“What just happened?”

“Onikiri happened. ...According to Mogami, it is an ancient divine weapon made in the Heian period. It belonged to Lady Yoshitsune for a time, but after the suicide of Minamoto Yoshisada, commander of the Northern and Southern Courts, it was inherited by Mogami. Its

name was changed several times along the way, but it was Onikiri when it passed into Mogami's possession."

As for its power...

"It cuts 'oni'...in other words 'the hidden'. Instead of its direct target, it uses their memories to search out those who provide the target with hidden support and it cuts them instead."

That was why the god of war pilot was unharmed.

...Instead, it cut the fellow pilots who supported him.

And that went beyond the other pilots his age who had been sent to attack the Musashi. Most likely, the maintenance workers in the hangar and his classmates had also fallen victim to that unavoidable sword strike.

Oniniwa had intentionally not told his unit the details of Mogami's Onikiri. If they knew of that power, they would have been too focused on everyone important to them. And that would only draw out Onikiri's power to 'cut the hidden' even more.

This was one of the reasons they never made a full attack on Mogami Yoshiaki yet never stopped fighting either.

Narumi saw a few flowers of water vapor created by explosions and she saw the gods of war falling like discarded stones. They had lost their helpers as well, so their fall would only end in a crash after flying for another few kilometers.

In an instant, many Date clan god of war pilots and their futures had been lost. Also...

"Oniniwa-san, are you okay?"

"Eight were taken out. Add in the maintenance and control personnel, and it's a total of twelve."

Oniniwa's voice sounded unconcerned coming from the sign frame. *He must be pissed*, thought Narumi, but...

"Are you feeling a little down?"

"Yes. I'm completely unharmed..."

"It means he feared you as a strict teacher, so you should celebrate."

"Testament. ...Sorry, Narumi. Some of them were ones you recommended."

“Keeping track of your grudges can only lead to losing your cool.”

“The people of Oushuu are only so calm because we make sure to hold grudges when one is warranted,” said Oniniwa. “But don’t stop me. Onikiri’s blade can see into your past, but on this battlefield, I can strike back by circling below the Yamagata Castle.”

“Oniniwa the oni is going to dodge Onikiri the oni slayer by hiding below the enemy ship? Is that supposed to be a play on words?”

“I have a large family, you see,” he said. “But why did Mogami begin this attack?”

“You know perfectly well, don’t you? ...We drew the line between threats and provocation in the wrong place. This means Mogami was just that much stricter than us there. Also...”

Narumi looked to the half-dragon and Musashi’s diplomat who was covering her ears against the cacophony of cannon fire.

“Mogami has decided to side with Musashi.”

This has gotten tricky, thought Adele.

“Well, setting aside their emotional issues, it’s our job to stop any unnecessary conflicts coming from the history recreation.”

Adele was eating some snacks on the deck of the Yamagata Castle’s central ship.

She was sitting on a cushion in front of a small table below a parasol. A sign reading “Arranged by the Lord of the Castle” stood on the tatami mats.

“Wow, I can see why Mogami is known for its rice. The rice cakes in this red bean soup are extra soft.”

She grabbed two rice cakes in her chopsticks and found they stretched differently. The Mogami girl acting as a waitress narrowed her eyes and explained.

“Mogami is a cold region, so we grow a few different varieties of rice to avoid having a bad crop. There is a difference between them, but since Lady Yoshiaki says they are all cute, we serve them all without discrimination.”

“I see.”

Adele was honestly impressed and she sensed something similar to Hassan’s love of curry, but then she faced forward.

“What’s the matter, Satomi President? You aren’t eating much.”

“Um, vassal...”

Adele looked around where the ship was shaking and vibrating from the cannon fire and impacts. The scattering light even arrived overhead, but...

“This is a lot better than getting hit by cannons in my mobile shell. Besides, being protected by someone else is a rare experience.”

This must be how relieved everyone feels when they’re standing behind me, realized Adele while feeling this place really was different from the Musashi.

“Is that how you view it?” asked the Satomi President. “Even if the cannon fire is being defended against, I can’t stand just sitting here without doing anything to help.”

Adele wondered if she really understood what that meant.

...It must mean she’s an offensive character.

She felt like people’s attitudes toward things were coming into focus more than back on the Musashi.

“But what is going on?”

While eating some of the azuki bean soup that had a hint of sweetness, Adele looked up at Yoshiaki dancing atop the bridge.

A sudden divine transmission had arrived from the smiling werefox earlier

“She said Mogami will prioritize their history recreation in order to keep their promise.”

“Does that mean Mogami was thinking the same thing we were?” asked Asama. “But why did they change their attitude so suddenly?”

Masazumi nodded on the terrace, but...

“...?”

When she heard an explosion in the sky, she and the anteater on her shoulder crossed their arms and tilted their heads.

...Why did they?

“Hmm,” she groaned, but then the Aoi Sister turned toward her after drinking the tea sitting on the terrace’s table.

“Heh heh. It would seem not even you know everything, flat-chested politician. I like that uncertainty. A woman with some mystery to her is a wonderful thing. Secrets are the flowers of life. And if you show someone a flower garden, they have no choice but to do some gardening. Everyone should hold at least one flower that one would want to take to bed, and doesn’t the hint of a secret make you want to find the answer?”

“Kimi, Izanagi turned back when he found the truth of Izanami’s secret in the underworld.”

“And my foolish brother pursued Horizon and even rushed out to her.”

“He was Toori-kun back then, not your foolish brother.”

“He was Toori. And I still call him that even after he returned. ...But Asama, you were a lot of help back then.”

“Yes, yes.”

The Aoi Sister smiled bitterly at Asama’s dismissive tone, but then she turned back to Masazumi.

“Perhaps this means we can build up a mutual relationship.”

“What do you mean?”

“You know, the old Far Eastern saying *sashitsu sasaretsu*. In English, they call that ‘in-in put-put’!”

“Kimi, that word doesn’t mean ‘input’. It means ‘penetra-...’

Asama trailed off and quickly waved her arms back and forth.

“Forget that! Forget I said that! The saying you want is *mochitsu motaretsu*, right!? And that means ‘give and take’ in English, right!?”

“I think Hanami’s having trouble dealing with that meter, so do something about that.”

But...

“I know I shouldn’t be saying this as the one in charge of politics and negotiations, but I have no idea what this means. As you said, we were thinking of making the same suggestion to Mogami. I was going to ask them why they had ended their anti-Sviet Rus and anti-Date history recreations. After all, Mogami Yoshiaki is supposed to be a schemer. I thought she

couldn't possible ignore it if I put it like that. But..."

But...

"I never expected her to do it on her own."

"Maybe something that was building up within Mogami just now reached its limit for some reason?"

Masazumi agreed with that assessment.

...But what was it?

What had caused a schemer like Mogami Yoshiaki to rush things? Based on the few divine transmissions they had heard...

"Do you remember hearing about a promise, Masazumi?"

"Yes. I don't know what that's about, but it's probably the key to all of this."

"Well done." The Aoi Sister nodded and asked Masazumi a question. "You know how to end this, don't you? When a man causes some trouble, a proper woman knows how to gently convince him to leave, you know? That way some nice memories await them when they next meet."

"Yes, I know. But there's something we have to do first."

Masazumi had Tsukinowa open a sign frame and then she sent out some instructions.

"Ambassadors, the conflict between Mogami and Sviet Rus predates Hashiba's interference, so do not get involved in that conflict. But if the two nations wish for a peaceful resolution, assist them there. On the other hand, Date made no obvious resistance toward Mogami before Hashiba's interference. They likely went too far with that direct god of war attack."

So...

"The diplomats sent to Date are to stop Date's attack on Mogami."

"Judge. According to Masazumi-sama, your current bombardment is an acceptable part of the history recreation. But..."

The automaton princess spoke in the artificial festival ground on the western end of the cannon fire.

“We believe it is about time we started for Sviet Rus.”

The demon woman raised her eyebrows and gave the princess a sharp look.

“Musashi Princess Horizon, are you telling Sviet Rus to fall back?”

“No, I am telling you to go, Shigenaga-sama. Go to Sviet Rus.”

The naked yukata boy raised his head next to the princess.

“How about you just tell her, Horizon?”

“Judge.”

Horizon looked at the demon woman in the eye and pointed to the southeast.

“Go!”

“Why do you have to twist everything I say!?” complained the idiot. “You don’t play fair these days!!”

“But isn’t it cute? It’s like speaking to a dog.”

“I-I am not a dog,” cut in Mitotsudaira. “And Horizon? I know you were pointing in a random direction just now, but that was right toward the Musashi!”

Then the demon woman asked a question while glaring at the princess.

“Why?”

Horizon nodded and gently tapped on the idiot’s chest with the back of her hand.

“Now, answer her.”

“Y-you’re forcing this stuff on me again!? Are you trying to pick a fight!? Are you!?”

“Um, my king? You are technically Musashi’s Viceroy.”

“Fine then,” said the idiot. “Hey, Shigeko. There was talk of a promise earlier, right? I don’t know what that is, but can you keep that promise like this?”

“_____”

Shigenaga stopped moving and the idiot looked up into the sky as if he saw that as her answer.

“What’s stopping you? It isn’t that fox lady, is it? She’s another one stressing out over not being able to keep it. So is it Date?”

“No!!”

Shigenaga’s shout shook the festival air, but Horizon responded expressionlessly.

“That settles it then.” She pointed to the southeast. “That is what is preventing all of you from keeping your promise, isn’t it?”

They all looked in the direction she was pointing and spoke the name of what they saw there.

“The Musashi?”

As they exchanged a puzzled look, Mitotsudaira silently grabbed Horizon’s waist and slowly turned her so she pointed south. Then she looked in the new direction Horizon was pointing.

“O-oh, my! Horizon! You were pointing at Hashiba Hidetsugu’s ship, weren’t you!?”

“Is it just me or is Mitotsudaira-dono becoming a pretty awful person...?”

“Just roll with it!”

As the silver wolf bared her fangs, the Scarred Princess stepped forward with her twin swords.

“What will you do?”

Mary spoke with a smile, but she was not really pressing Shigenaga for an answer. She simply wished to confirm what option the demon woman had chosen.

There was a short pause and Mitotsudaira used it to step forward.

Rather than protect those behind them, the two of them only stood there and filled their lungs with air.

Then...

“Hit to the first port barrier! The damage has reached the deepest barrier!”

With that ship-wide announcement, another cannon blast hit nearby. All shadows were erased by the light that appeared a few dozen meters into the courtyard’s eastern sky.

The impact whipped about as wind and the festival stands shook, but the ninja stepped forward.

“Shigenaga-dono. You have already fired your cannons and sent out your transport ship. Wouldn’t that be enough to satisfy Hashiba? In fact, exposing yourselves to any more of Mogami’s attacks could qualify as the history recreation of Sviet Rus and Mogami’s conflict after Nobunaga’s assassination, which would be inconvenient for Hashiba. If you do not wish to worsen your position with Hashiba and such a decision would be difficult to make for the commander on the scene, I would think the best option would be to put some distance between yourselves and Mogami to maintain the current lack of conflict.”

“Does Musashi presume to lecture Sviet Rus on its politics?”

“Not at all. I merely thought Sviet Rus would have already taken that much into account.”

“Why are these visitors so meddlesome?”

“Because. “ Mary smiled. “Spirits place a lot of weight on the word ‘promise’.”

“Knights also place a lot of importance on the word ‘promise’.”

When Shigenaga heard the two girls, she raised her eyebrows a little, but...

“I shouldn’t have let you hear that word.”

She lowered her eyebrows, looked away, and turned her back. She then walked toward the festival with casual but uninterrupted movements. She raised her right hand along the way.

“All personnel and all ships, the primary mission of our fleet is to welcome and entertain our diplomatic guests. To continue with that mission, we must all provide a warm welcome. A Sviet Rus fleet will not view such a trivial obstacle as an attack. If we are to cross the iron-splitting cold, we must welcome a wind such as this like the spring wind.”

“Testament!!”

“Now.” Shigenaga looked back over her shoulder and spoke to the Musashi group. “Summer is short in Sviet Rus. This is a diplomatic ship meant to provide that ultimate luxury, so enjoy yourselves. Once that is over, we will travel to Sviet Rus...our constantly frozen homeland. And...”

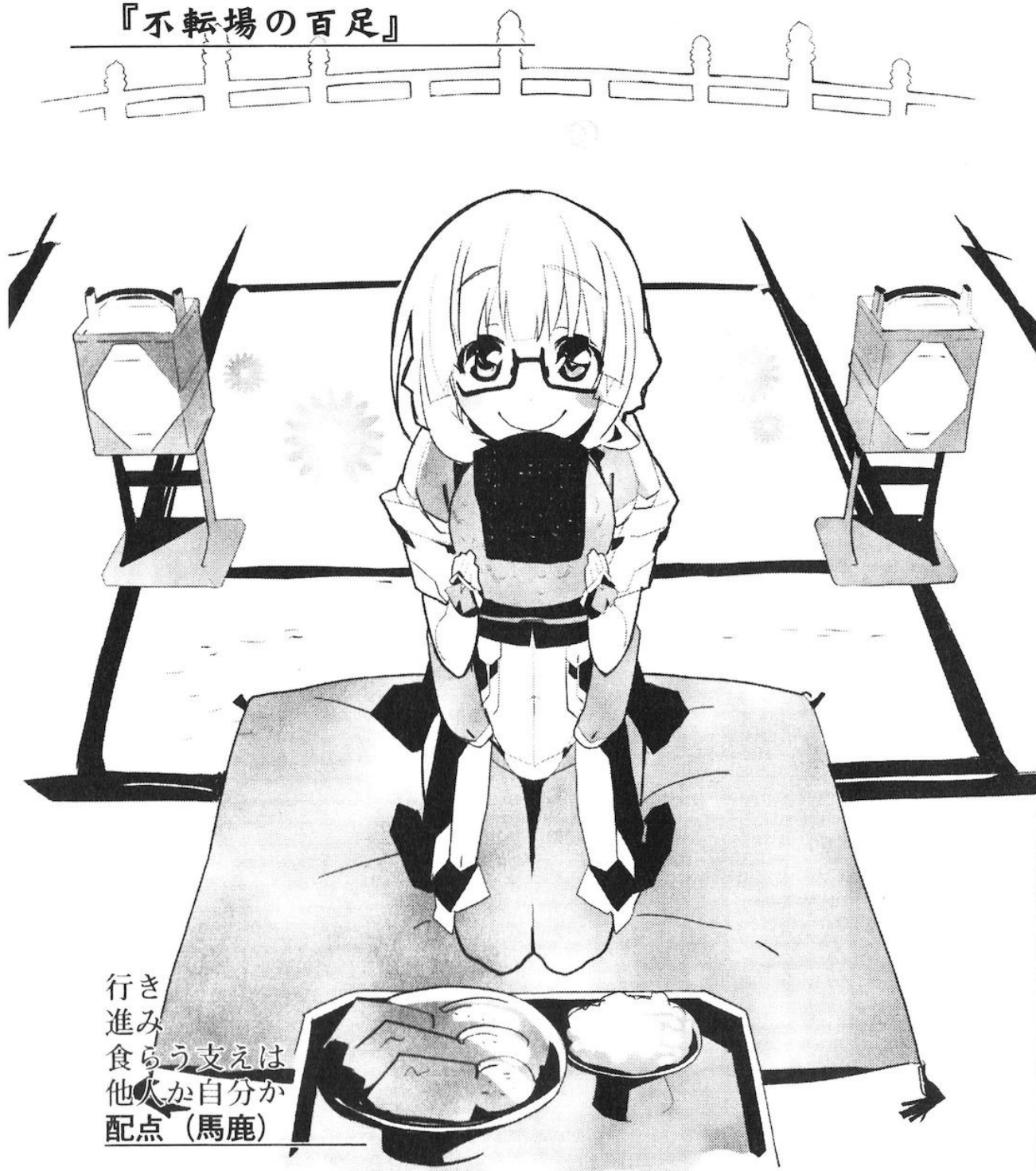
She opened a *sankt okno* which displayed Date’s fleet.

“I will be watching how Musashi responds to Date. I’d like to know just how much resolve you have. Mogami and Date are both major powers in Oushuu, so uncertain strength will not be enough to stand up to them.”

Chapter 39: Centipede of an Unturning Stage

第三十九章

『不転場の百足』



行き
進み
食らう
他人か
配点 (馬鹿)

Is it you or someone else

That supports you

As you go, advance, and devour?

Point Allocation (Idiot)

The vassal was invited to the Yamagata Castle's roof as the cannon fire continued.

She sat on a cushion as a large form danced before her.

It was a woman with a foxlike body.

She was taller than the vassal and she waved fans and danced with large sweeping motions. With each motion, cannon fire would roar, lights would roar, and noise would shatter. Upside-down torii-style lights would appear and shatter in the sky on the left and right, either allowing the noise in or cutting it off.

Nevertheless, the fox danced calmly and the vassal spoke behind her.

“You really do have great rice here.”

She was nibbling on a rice cracker large enough to hold in both hands. A sound of destruction stickier than the roar of cannons came from her mouth and the fox asked a question.

“Would you like more?”

“Judge!”

“Good, good.”

The fox tossed her fans into the air as she danced. While they danced on their own to automatically control the cannon fire, she pulled a paper bag from her sleeve.

“What would you like?”

“Something like that wafer! It was great!”

“Then let us save that for last. How about this instead?”

“Ohhh, that rice cracker smells like azuki! It has honey inside, doesn't it!?”

“Good, good.”

The fox rubbed the vassal’s head, caught the falling fans, and crossed her arms to the opposite sides to fire metal shells. But...

“So Honjou has fallen back, has she? The girl is growing up.”

“Do you know her?”

“She is my uncle’s mother’s son’s grandmother’s sister’s daughter’s grandchild’s child’s friend.”

“Oh, so she’s a friend of your daughter.”

“I was only kidding.”

“Eh?” said the vassal with a tilt of the head.

“You seem quite gullible.”

The fox gave the vassal a rice cracker wrapped in seaweed, rubbed her head, and then waved her fans around.

She danced. Sounds of steel and sparks passed through the sky in tune with her playful dance. She made a great spin as if passing through the sky and the wind filled her sleeves.

“My mother and father were both hunted down by humans long ago. I had no family. That is why I wield Onikiri.”

“Is that so?”

“I was only kidding.”

“Is that so?”

The vassal nibbled at the rice cracker and the fox rubbed her head with a smile.

“I was only kidding about that.”

The fox made a “ko ko” laugh in her throat and turned her back on the vassal.

“Oh, a dog.”

“Don’t call me a dog. Especially when you’re known as the Fox of Ushuu.”

The response came from the front deck below the fox and the vassal. A canine god of war in dress clothes stood there with...

“How are you anything but a dog with that hairstyle? I wonder that every time I see you.”

“Huh? You two know each other?”

“The Oushuu and Kantou Peace Council is held differently when it’s invited to the various academies’ school festivals. Sometimes we exchange words and sometimes we exchange insults.”

The dog used the bare minimum of motion to give the god of war a hand signal, but it was still enough for its autonomous functions to take a combat pose.

“So how about you stop this?”

“Are you not going to stop us with that god of war?”

“Mogami’s attacks against Sviet Rus and Date are part of the history recreation. It’s necessary for Oushuu’s history, so there is no political issue as long as you don’t cause too much damage.”

“Is this an attempt to make me feel indebted to you?”

“It is.”

The vassal asked a question while still nibbling on the rice cracker.

“Indebted?”

“Ko ko.” laughed the fox. “Date and Sviet Rus have several skirmishes with Mogami in the history recreation. But with Hashiba watching our every move, we cannot carelessly recreate them and thus we cannot advance our history. So...”

“Matsudaira will approve Mogami’s actions as part of the history recreation? In other words, Mogami will have the stamp of approval from Matsudaira, the clan that will determine Oushuu’s borders later on?”

“You’re a clever one.”

The fox rubbed the vassal’s head and gave her some three-colored rakugan.

“For a while...”

The fox waved her fans around once more.

“For a while, we shall keep things the way they are.”

“Why?”

“The same reason as you. ...The Fox of Ushuu never lets her prey escape, even if it means being cursed.”

The fox continued her dance.

“Now.”

She asked a question of the rumbling sky.

“What will the dragon do?”

“Then I must stop you.”

The girl in a dress reacted to the half-dragon boy’s words.

Ignoring the wind now, she spread her prosthetic limbs a little to stand in the boy’s way. He tilted his head in response.

“You are obstructing my work. Move.”

“This is my work. I’m supposed to stop any idiots.”

The overlapping cannon fire combined with the shattering of the defense barriers, but they could still hear each other.

“Are you sure *I’m* the idiot here?” he asked.

After a moment, she smiled bitterly.

“It is true that Date has fallen into a fairly idiotic situation. But...”

“Just to be clear, we have one hell of an idiot on the Musashi, so you don’t stand a chance if it comes to an idiot-off.”

“You mean that nudist?”

“Close but no cigar. He is both a nudist and a crossdresser.”

“How awful...”

“You were wrong, so move.”

“It would seem you are unfamiliar with the three-mistake rule.”

The mechanical noise of steel wires being drawn taut came from behind her. It was the catapult lane being prepared.

A god of war was about to be sent out.

“I can stop that.”

“How?”

“Standing in the way. ...Just as you are doing now.”

“This is a god of war. And one being launched with a catapult lane at that.”

“Have you already forgotten what you yourself said? You said you were stopping any idiots.”

“That’s true.” She took a step back. “And that means I can prove you are an idiot by stopping you.”

“Why the hesitation? ...Must you prove who someone is to know them?”

“That is the kind of land this is. It holds a history of resistance, betrayal, and grudges.”

“That makes it a land of mere decoration.”

The girl took a deep breath, lowered her raised eyebrows, leaned back, raised the corners of her mouth a little, and gave him a downward look.

“What do you know?”

“I know that you understand nothing of my essential genre.”

She did not respond. She simply swung her body back while taking another step.

“Unturning Centipede!”

Narumi realized the situation from the previous night had returned.

Back then, the half-dragon had said something odd and caused a malfunction in Unturning Centipede’s summoning, but that did not happen this time.

She was surrounded by the tension of battle this time, plus...

...He mocked us!

He had called Oushuu a land of mere decoration.

What was he calling a decoration?

In order to resist, they had waged war with the people of the central Far East, they had fought to survive in that frigid land, and they were now figuring out how to survive the Warring States period.

...All of it was a desperate struggle!

She sensed the noise and pressure of the air being pushed out of the way behind her and a bed-like sensation opened up there.

It was Unturning Centipede. The armor opened from waist to chest as if to embrace her from behind.

“...Eh?”

The color white arrived in front of her.

It was the half-dragon.

...That was fast!?

That's strange, she thought.

Based on the night before, having about a step's worth of distance from him should have allowed her to harmonically equip Unturning Centipede before the half-dragon could accelerate to full speed. That was why she had given herself two steps.

She had intended for that to be enough to harmonically equip the device and make a counterattack.

But the half-dragon was faster. Her armor had yet to cover the area below her chest as he charged in below her gaze.

The reason for his speed was obvious.

...He turned to the side!

He had likely been building up and pressurizing ether inside him while they talked. Once he

had expelled that from his back ejection ports for incredible speed, he had turned to the side to reduce air resistance.

He was like a knife stabbing into the air.

The turned stance and the reduced air resistance gave him the speed and reach he needed. As for Narumi...

“Evade!”

She moved back and to the left and she twisted her body to protect her heart. If she made it even a single step back, she could finish harmonically equipping Unturning Centipede before the clash. So more than take a powerful step back, she used a quick and nimble step back as the incomplete portion of Unturning Centipede rang loudly.

She rushed herself.

The color white arrived a moment later. While turned sideways, the half-dragon had swung his arm to the side to pursue her diagonal retreat.

“If you are to strike one cheek, go ahead and strike the other as well! Holy Man Double Lariat!!”

His cry and the crash of a collision occurred concurrently.

Urquiaga felt his blow land.

He had hit.

After a grazing blow to the left and right, he got a solid hit on the right.

He felt the impact and the creaking of armor through his right arm and the sound shook his surroundings.

The colliding air had nowhere to go and burst out from between him and Narumi. He had a thought as he listened to that harmonic vibration.

...I broke it!!

He could see Narumi’s face ahead and to the right.

She had not harmonically equipped her mobile shell quickly enough.

The result of his strike could be seen beyond his right arm.

He looked to that arm that was also a giant wing, but...

“Mh?”

He thought he had broken it, but he was wrong.

His arm had simply been caught inside the automatic harmonic equipping of the mobile shell. Several armor panels had caught and bitten at his arm like jaws.

...Then the damage would have been distributed throughout.

A few pieces of expanded armor on Unturning Centipede's side were being rearranged. The mobile shell was working to allow the damage to escape safely.

Urquiaga then noticed the sensation in the three fingers of his right hand.

That hand had a solid enough grip on something to dig into it. It was soft, but it had a firm core and was somewhat warm and damp.



“_____”

He looked to Narumi’s face. She was blushing, her mouth was spread horizontally and bent like a wave, and her widened eyes were staring down at her own chest.

To sum up the situation...

“You should really wear a bra in battle. This is just being careless.”

“U-um, Urquiaga...-kun? ...Sh-she was holding...her skirt, s-so she is probably...wearing a dress. And, um,” said Suzu. “M-maybe it’s...th-the kind of dress...where you can’t...wear one?”

I see. Now that you mention it, that’s right.

...That explains it. And in that case...

“Judge. Then this is what you call an act of god. ...God provided my right hand with a miracle. An unwelcome miracle as you are not an elder sister, but still.”

A moment later, Urquiaga was knocked into the air by a full-power kick. Next, Narumi gave a shout while holding her chest.

“Have you no shame!?”

Narumi was on the move.

She could not allow herself to think. She could not allow herself to think about anything right now.

She focused entirely on suppressing her target and had to act accordingly. But...

...Ahh.

A tremor or a shaking was wreaking havoc in her heart. She forced it down, telling herself she could not allow herself to realize what it meant. If she did realize that, she was certain something would go horribly wrong.

But...

...You...

It leaked out.

...You idiot.

Why is my vision so shaky? Isn't the sight device data supposed to be directly projected into my eyes? Then is it due to the speed? Yes. That must be it. It definitely isn't due to tears. My mouth is trembling, my cheeks are so warm and tense, and my pulse is racing because...because... Don't think about it. But this means... No, don't think about it. It can't...it can't be that. That could never happen to Date's Vice Chancellor. So this isn't that. It's the high-speed mobility.

“Uuh...”

She audibly groaned to slow her thoughts and then she began an attack on the half-dragon.

Urquiaga realized the crucial moment had arrived.

He told himself that whatever result he produced here would determine what happened later.

Unturning Centipede arrived from directly ahead. The dark green and red mobile shell resembled a dragon and had no physical wings.

The weapon was designed as a centipede to be a symbol of forward motion without ever turning back.

But that centipede had wings now. The four wings were made of dark green light. Unturning Centipede flapped those main wings backwards and glowing dark green fragments exploded behind it.

...Here she comes!

The mobile shell made his thought a reality.

He could see her. He could feel heat in his eyes because he had fully opened his half-dragon ocular nerves that were made for high-speed movement. To others, his eyes would look gold.

...I'm so cool!

But he instantly lost sight of Unturning Centipede.

She had not vanished and she had not escaped to the side. She was crawling on the ground.

She had leaned forward. The jaws of the draconic face were only two centimeters off the

deck. Her back drew a mountain-like arch, but then the waist at the peak pointed diagonally back toward the deck.

The centipede charged toward him as if running up the horizontal axis. Even the line of acceleration light extending from the back was horizontal. It was not pointed upwards. That meant Unturning Centipede was relying entirely on her sense of balance to run and all of her movements were directed forward.

Urquiaga responded by releasing all of the dragon breath inside his body.

He placed only the claws of his feet on the deck and used his muscles to turn the acceleration ejection ports on his legs and waist.

“_____!”

He launched himself forward and to the left with all of his might.

White light exploded in the air behind the half-dragon.

He had used his dragon breath to accelerate. It was normally fired from a dragon’s mouth as an attack, but aerial half-dragons could fire it from the ejection ports across their bodies to fly and accelerate.

The temperature difference created a mist above the deck and it cut off his horizontal vision like a solid wall.

He leaped forward and to the left as if kicking off that wall.

This gliding movement was like a short jump for a half-dragon and it provided incredible initial speed. He moved with such force that he left some of the acceleration light back at the launch point.

The shell that acted as primary armor trembled from the shock of acceleration.

But as he flew with his claws gliding along the deck, he turned to face Unturning Centipede as she passed by on the right.

He found the mobile shell right in front of him.

“When did she get there!?”

The centipede immediately swung both arms.

Vermilion light sprayed out from empty air on the left and right as each hand pulled a vermillion sword from a point low to the deck.

The swords were made from three sections. They were six meters long and the section at the tip formed a hook-like curve. Together, those curves created a pair of mandibles.

The two attacks moved like two crisscrossing arms, yet it was a motion that no human could emulate.

The forward-leaning Unturning Centipede's shoulders rose toward the back.

The pilot used her false arms to surpass the limits of human joints.

The twin three-section swords attacked the half-dragon from either side.

However, the half-dragon did not move. When he rotated his body, it was not just to face a different direction. It was to take air into his body through the opened ejection ports. He compressed that air inside and blended it with the pressurizing light sent from the dragon breath producing organ at the bottom of his throat.

He released it from all over his body.

“Kwoh!”

The forced speed sent him back and to the left.

He avoided the centipede's jaws.

Urquiaga saw Unturning Centipede's attack.

She swung the two swords to intersect like an embrace. Due to the three sections of the swords, the entire blade created a curve, preventing him from pulling his arms back easily. That should have created some dead time, but Urquiaga threw off that timing.

His opponent was Date's Vice Chancellor while he was the 2nd Special Duty Officer. When it came to comparative combat skill, it was normal for her to be more insane than him.

He had recently realized that being obsessed with battle and touched in the head was the key to strength in this world. On the other hand, he built torture beds to help around the house and he enjoyed porn games. Lately, he had begun visiting the Ariake's hole-in-the-wall kebab restaurants and his favorite spells in RPGs were the poison ones.

That all added up to being a perfectly normal half-dragon, so he was nothing like this strange

Vice Chancellor.

After all, just look at what was happening.

Unturning Centipede had thrown away her own arms.

“So that’s it!”

Instead of hitting him, Unturning Centipede removed and threw both arms as if throwing away the intersecting swords.

A moment later, new false arms were spatially ejected onto her shoulders.

<Connection: confirmed>

Her forward-leaning pose bounced up for just a moment as they connected.

By the time they attached, the new arms were already drawing two new swords.

The next attack was coming.

However, something was clearly not right. Urquiaga had leaped back and to the left with all his might, but Unturning Centipede was keeping up as she ran.

A closer look showed the legs bent at an impossible angle for a human.

To both change direction and move forward, the legs’ hip joints had shifted diagonally as the toes kicked off the deck.

Centipedes did not turn back. They would bend their body and continue ever forward.

That was all Unturning Centipede was doing.

In that case, decided Urquiaga as he spread his arms.

“Excellent.”

This was it.

“This is the true crucial moment!”

He charged straight toward Unturning Centipede.

The half-dragon did not hold back.

In preparation to stop the centipede, he swung his forearm as if to reap the head crawling along the ground.

But the centipede dodged it. She slid one body's width to the side, using her body rather than her legs. She removed her torso and head from the running arms and legs and rolled to a face-up position skimming just above the ground.

She did not hesitate to remove, let go of, and abandon her arms and legs.

This created an armless and legless centipede with wings. The feminine lines of Narumi's chest and belly bent backwards as she stuck her hips up like a bow and rolled in midair to dodge.

This was not a human action, but then arms and legs ejected from empty air and reattached to her shoulders and waist.

<Connection: confirmed>

Without losing any speed, the centipede continued her dash to assault the half-dragon. The half-dragon responded by sliding along the deck and beginning to circle to the centipede's side.

<Confirmed>

<Confirmed>

<Confirmed>

<Confirmed>

The unlit sign frames began summarizing the connection display as Unturning Centipede repeatedly rolled through the air to face the half-dragon. The four limbs followed the centipede and her entire body circled widely around the half-dragon.

"Here I go!"

The centipede attacked the half-dragon from behind. She pulled two mandible swords from the air.

She was farther away than before, but that was why the mandible swords had five sections this time.

The sectioned fangs assaulted the half-dragon like twin scythes. Instead of just being hit, he

would be pinned and crushed.

The half-dragon had predicted the centipede's movements, so he quickly leaped forward.

“Not good enough!”

He dodged and moved away.

But by the time he turned around, the centipede was already rolling after him again.

Like that, their speed never slowed.

“Ohhh!”

<Confirmed>

Their speed and attacks intersected.

They could both dodge and attack at the same time and their speed simply increased the density of those actions.

Sparks flew as they scraped at the deck, leaving slowly fading traces of the paths they had taken.

But even at such great speed, they added in even more motion so their attacks would hit.

As the half-dragon took evasive action, he swung both arms and kicked off the deck with his toes to tackle her with his body weight.

Meanwhile, the centipede chose something else.

“!”

To accelerate, she moved her hips higher than before and a little forward.

Instead of just leaning forward, she had practically bent her body in two.

This sent the power of her false legs to her hips instead of her upper body.

“...!”

The centipede gained a considerable speed boost.

The centipede bit at the half-dragon with even more speed than before.

Her mandible swords were down to three sections.

But there was a sudden explosion of air.

It came from the half-dragon.

He had opened all of the ejection ports on his waist, legs, feet, and arms.

“Let’s put this to the test,” he said. “My top speed against your-...”

The centipede had already arrived, so he cut his commentary short and launched himself forward.

Urquiaga was aiming for the instant when Unturning Centipede moved forward and sent out the first two swords.

While she constantly moved forward, her speed would occasionally drop and she would need to reaccelerate. Examples were when she made her repeated rolls or when he moved away from her.

At those times, she would abandon her swords and accelerate after him. She would draw new swords while picking up speed, but she had to make sure the drawing and striking action did not lower her speed. In other words...

...It’s slow!

That created an opening.

It was possible Unturning Centipede would summon new arms and guard with them, but his collision would be more powerful. He would definitely knock her away and do damage.

He did not think this qualified as an actual tactic, but it was the right answer when facing someone at the Vice Chancellor level.

Just as everyone would trip on stones and avoid walls, collisions of pure strength could not be denied in battle. Even at the Vice Chancellor level, a great force from directly ahead would still hit her.

That was why he simply sent himself forward for his strike.

He did not bother trying to hit. They were close by, she was right in front of him, and they

were both accelerating.

He would hit her no matter what, so he just let it happen.

“Ohhh!”

His high-speed vision saw Unturning Centipede’s movement.

To put some distance between them, the centipede abandoned her sword-drawing arms and summoned new arms.

Sign frames and spraying light overlapped as the two arms connected.

Urquiaga charged in with all his strength to show the time of impact had come.

Unturning Centipede did not try to fight it.

In her swift forward motion, she did not even use both arms against the half-dragon’s forward-thrust arm.

She reached just the right arm out and extended just the index finger.

“_____”

She touched the enemy. That was all.

Yet that small movement stopped something.

The half-dragon’s charge lost all speed and stopped.

Urquiaga clearly saw it and felt it.

He instantly lost his speed as it was devoured by the centipede.

The trick was simple.

It was a single finger.

It had happened as soon as Unturning Centipede had reached out her finger and touched his forearm.

Her finger shattered from the impact.

Of course, it did not all end there. The instant her finger shattered, a new finger was instantly summoned. It too broke to pieces, but another new one was summoned in its place. Yet again, the finger broke and one was summoned.

“It isn’t stopping!?”

The sign frames and metal fingers overlapped with such frequency that they divided an “instant” into thousands of pieces.

During the continual summoning, more and more ether light scattered.

The finger receiving the impact was swapped out with one that was not in order to rapidly absorb the shock.

Hundreds if not thousands of rapidly summoned fingers absorbed his impact and...

“It’s stopping me!?”

...So this is the Date Vice Chancellor’s defense technique!

By the time the fingers stopped summoning and the final one remained, Urquiaga’s speed was gone.

It had all happened in an instant, so it would have looked like he had slowed for no reason as soon as they came into contact.

Meanwhile, Unturning Centipede approached without having lost any speed.

She was on a collision course.

However, he saw the centipede roll to the side. She rolled twice to slide completely out of the way.

He quickly realized why she had done so. As she passed by him, a newly summoned arm stretched backwards.

That arm held a mandible sword, but this one had...

...Thirty-two sections!?

She was trying to saw him apart as she moved past.

He was not moving and it was too late to start moving forward or back now. He had already

used up the dragon breath he would need for that.

So...

“_____!”

He flew.

He did not use his legs or the acceleration organ in his waist.

He used pure muscular strength. When a half-dragon flew, their initial speed came from their leg strength.

“I take flight!”

He instantly rose thirty meters into the sky.

Narumi simply pursued her opponent.

She had finally eliminated all of her unnecessary thoughts. Combat was wonderful. It demanded her focus and let her immerse herself in it.

The half-dragon had moved up and she passed by below. At this rate, she would show her back to him. But...

“Did you think I wouldn’t pursue!?”

She moved her body. She lifted it as if to pursue the half-dragon into the sky.

“Unturning Centipede...Activate: Countless Hundreds of Paths!!”

Unturning Centipede started by abandoning her arms.

She bent up and back into a curve to view her prey in the heavens.

Once the two running legs were disconnected, something else was summoned: new legs.

To match the body bent back toward the sky, the summoned legs were angled nearly horizontally.

But it was more than just the one pair. More and more appeared in the sky, leading up to the

flying half-dragon.

<Activate: Countless Hundreds of Paths: Confirmed>

Hundreds and then more than a thousand legs lined up in the sky to create a path.

Unturning Centipede's body raced along that path.

The first pair of summoned legs attached to the waist, stepped her up into the sky, and then disconnected. The body's momentum sent it forward so the next pair of summoned legs could forcibly attach. As soon as they did, they launched the torso forward and detached.

“_____!”

By repeating the process, Unturning Centipede's body ran along the looping rails created by the legs.

The centipede's path of legs formed a circling loop that pursued the half-dragon overhead.

The centipede continued leaning back to keep the half-dragon in her sights at all times as she ran along the curving path of legs.

Of course, keeping him in her sights was not enough.

<Confirmed>

New legs added countless junctions to the path. In order to continue crawling after him no matter where he fled, the legs formed a sphere to surround him. The sounds of those legs attaching and detaching sounded like countless footsteps.

Then the arms came.

It was more than just one pair. In the span of a breath, more than eight arms were summoned. They attacked with mandible swords as if to slice through the hundred-meter sphere created from the curving paths of legs.

The swords had six or seven sections. Due to the distance, some had more than ten or even twenty.

“_____!”

Unturning Centipede circled over the half-dragon's head and leaped.

She twisted her body, made a feint by pretending to change direction using newly summoned legs, and raised her arms.

“Paths of Countless Hundreds.”

<Confirmed>

After speaking that reversed name, one hundred left and right arms appeared in the air and drew a total of two hundred swords with one hundred sections each.

In an instant, the air was sliced many times over and the swords raced in curving arcs as if to squeeze the sphere made from legs. Just before the swords touched the cage of legs, all of the legs were transferred to their storage space and the spherical barrier was formed from only the mandible swords.

The two hundred hundred-section red mandibles only had to wrap around their prey from every direction and bite down on him. However, the half-dragon remained nearly motionless amid all that movement.

All he did was swing back his arms and face Unturning Centipede as she prepared to narrow down the mandible sword barrier.

“This is my win, unturning girl.”

The two hundred vermilion attacks swung down as if to tear apart his words.

The wind vanished, as did the mist.

Everything in the sky lost its strength and fell.

The many centipede legs, arms, and mandibles seemed to decay and crumble away.

But as they fall, they were swallowed up by light and vanished.

That left only three figures.

One was Unturning Centipede standing in the air with dark green wings spread, one was the half-dragon in front of her, and the last...

“If I hadn’t stopped, you would have been torn to shreds, Oniniwa-san.”

A god of war with demonic horns decorating the shoulders stood between the two of them.

It was colored red and black. It had a draconic design and it held both arms out toward Unturning Centipede. There were traces of the centipede’s mandibles having sliced into its armor.

But in the high-altitude wind, Oniniwa's god of war lowered its shoulders instead of sighing.

"Don't get so worked up, Narumi. The battle is over."

...The battle is over?

Only after repeating him in her heart did she realize the sounds of cannon fire had ceased.

She could only hear the wind.

"Why?"

She then realized Oniniwa was looking toward the ship. His inattention was casual, but unthinkable on the battlefield. She quickly followed his gaze.

...Is that...?

Musashi's diplomat stood at the base of the bridge.

When did that happen? she wondered before realizing the half-dragon had created a flashy explosion of dragon breath when he had initially accelerated. That had covered the deck in mist, meaning...

"Narumi. That is the true diplomat."

She had gotten all worked up over a diversion. But...

"Didn't Musashi's diplomat come here on the assumption that we would not be holding any political negotiations?"

"There were two reasons for this. One is over there."

Oniniwa pointed into the southern sky behind him. A large form was visible in the sky between them and the Musashi.

It was a Far Eastern transport ship, most likely belonging to the Musashi or the Ariake.

However, one part of the ship was different from normal. The bridge embedded in the stern had a white wind sock flowing backwards and a large sign frame on the front read "Automatic Cruising".

It was apparently being automatically piloted toward the Date fleet. The reason why was obvious.

A few large figures could be seen on the flat ship.

They were Date gods of war.

The ones taken out by Onikiri would have been able to regain some control, but they would not have been able to take flight again. The Musashi must have sent a ship out to rescue them. A closer look showed the name “Musashi Provisional Council” written on the side of the ship.

“They’re almost too kind to not send out a Student Council or Chancellor’s Officers ship.”

“True,” agreed Narumi as she viewed the gods of war hit by Onikiri. She also saw a vermilion god of war vanishing into the sky beyond the transport ship.

The god of war was using the cross-shaped flight device of a Tres Españan El Azor and it had likely been the one that collected the damaged gods of war in midair.

“That’s going a bit far to score some points.”

“It’s only an annoyance for me. Now I have more people I have to scold.”

Narumi responded to Oniniwa’s comment with a bitter laugh and then a sigh.

...I’m really off my game here.

She agreed that the battle was over, so she looked up to face the half-dragon beyond Oniniwa.

She suddenly wondered whether she should say something like normal or say something different from normal. Not that she knew what either of those things would be.

But...

“Yes.”

There was no point in being reluctant when it came to someone who had kept up with her well enough that she had to show her true skill, even if just for a moment. More importantly, she was belatedly impressed that he had been able to face her like that.

In Date at least, no one could keep up with Unturning Centipede in a battle on the ground. Katakura was the only one with the necessary reaction speed, but he could not make the necessary movements. Half-dragons were a rare race and they were an unknown for Date, even though the clan used a dragon motif.

...But it seems their combat skills are solid.

She sighed in her heart as she decided not to be careless or to look down on him. She opened her mouth again to say something to the half-dragon, but...

...Eh?

She realized he was looking down at the bridge.

Narumi looked back.

The half-dragon's eyes were turned toward Musashi's diplomat, but she recalled what Oniniwa had said earlier.

...There were two reasons we ended the battle.

The first was Musashi retrieving Date's gods of war. Then what was the other?

"Masamune!!"

Narumi saw the figure in the center of her vision.

The skinny girl's long black hair was blowing in the wind. She was smiling as she spoke with Musashi's diplomat, but then she noticed Narumi.

"_____"

The girl waved and Narumi could read the greeting on her lips.

"I see," said the half-dragon. "Splendid! Mukai, did you make an appeal by showing her my battle and my intellectual victory!?"

This half-dragon is one of them! thought Narumi as her jaw dropped, but something else required her attention more.

"Oniniwa-san! Why did you bring Masamune here!? Ko-..."

She forcibly swallowed the name she nearly spoke, but she spat out another a moment later.

"Hashiba Hidetsugu is here!"

A sound seemed to cut off her shouted question.

It was the sound of cannon fire from the western sky.

...A physical shell from the Yamagata Castle!?

Mogami Chancellor Mogami Yoshiaki had fired a sniper-like shot to the south.

The power and fuel efficiency of ether cannons had stabilized in the modern age, so there was only one reason to use a physical shell: speed. By placing an acceleration spell on the shell itself, it became nearly invisible and struck the enemy before the sound even arrived.

This would be the same. The sound of its flight followed after the shell, but Narumi knew its target.

A Hashiba and Houjou fleet floated in the sky at the southern border of Mito territory.

“Hashiba Hidetsugu!!”

The shell revealed its power in the southern sky.

Mogami’s attack struck Hashiba Hidetsugu’s Jurakudai, a combat diplomatic ship, which was defenselessly observing the battle.

Chapter 40: Dragon of an Azure Place

第四十章

『青場の竜』



叫び
吠え
抗う不明は
他人か自分か
配点 (力)

Is it you or someone else

That shouts

Roars

And provides unclear resistance?

Point Allocation (Power)

Yoshiyasu looked back from atop Righteousness to follow the path of the shot.

It was a high-speed cannon blast that used its kinetic energy to provide destruction. Based on the sound, it was a Far Eastern 10 *sun* caliber cannon with a barrel length of more than thirty calibers. There was no shockwave from the muzzle when it was fired, so...

...Is that why the Yamagata Castle left its defense barriers up even after the cannon fire from the left and right ended!?

No, Mogami's ruler had been in control of the cannons this entire time, so this shot had not been made on a whim.

“Was all of this leading up to this one shot, Mogami Yoshiaki!?”

Yoshiyasu faced forward again to see the fox on the Yamagata Castle's rooftop.

The nine tails was making the final motion of her dance. She swung the right of her two fans up in front of her and then spread it out. She reversed her wrist to point the front of the fan toward the sky, then she raised and closed it.

A moment later, a white explosion burst from the Jurakudai waiting in the southern sky.

The shockwave created by the force of impact had pushed the air out of the way on a large scale, causing fog to spread.

The fleets waiting in the southern sky of Kantou began moving in different directions.

The Dragon-class ships belonging to various Kantou nations, which were deployed around the Jurakudai and the rest of Hashiba Hidetsugu's fleet, began slowly moving northeast.

They were spreading themselves out to act as a useless shield against the Ariake.

But Hojou's barracks fleet did something else. They ignored the cannon fire from the north and moved southwest. They were distancing themselves from the water vapor spreading explosively from the Jurakudai's front deck.

"Kotarou, send a divine transmission out to the supreme command ship. Tell them our fleet is not equipped with the defense spells necessary for high-speed physical shells, so we cannot protect them any longer. You may use my name if you wish. That would probably convince them more quickly."

The Houjou flagship was the Odawara Castle. It was a flat angular warship and a girl with closed eyes and cattle horns spoke on the terrace atop the central ship. She was a dark-skinned demonic long-lived, but she had an automaton body. She slowly looked up into the sky.

A tremor ran through the clouds there.

Then a girl's voice reached her from behind.

"That would be the Shirasagi, Ujinao-sama."

"I know that perfectly well. It has been watching us since last night without resupplying. I can't imagine how much national power P.A. Oda must have to make free use of a ship like that. Not to mention how much they must trust Hashiba."

Ujinao did not sound discouraged and she turned to look at the ninja girl Mouse standing on the deck.

"We must eventually fight and defeat that Shirasagi...or rather, its Takigawa Ichimasu."

"Can we really do that?"

"We will do just fine if you work at it hard enough, Kotarou."

"I can't do anything... I was only taken in by you."

"Not true." Ujinao rejected Kotarou's words. "You picked up that footage from the northern border and from the west after the Battle of Mikatagahara."

"If you get down to it, that was someone else's accomplishment..."

"You are the one that did it and I was the one that asked for it. You always respond to my trust in you and I have received exactly the results I wanted from you. Where is the problem in that?"

“Ujinao-sama, sometimes you can be more logic-obsessed than a Mouse like me.”

“A cutting-edge Mouse like you is made up of far more logic than me.”

“I suppose so.” Kotarou sighed with a bitter smile in her voice. “But...”

She displayed a few sign frames and displayed the captains’ various opinions on the map of their course.

“Why isn’t Hashiba’s fleet moving? That was a significant explosion, but they aren’t moving and their alarms aren’t ringing. Even their captains are only saying to keep things as-is.”

“Testament. Keeping things as-is is a safe decision, so there is no problem there. That must mean they predicted something like this.”

“They predicted they would take a direct hit from a high-speed cannon without any defense barrier up?”

“And that is why they are not reacting. But...” Ujinao held her closed eyes. “I can see an odd premonition from beyond that explosion.”

“From the flow of ether?”

“Testament.” Ujinao nodded but gently tilted her head. “I have seen this kind of flow before. It isn’t exactly the same, but it’s similar. ...The output is almost like...”

At that point, she suddenly looked over to the Ariake.

“A god of war!”

Jizuri Suzaku landed on the Ariake’s vast white roof with its claws scraping across the surface, but before its slide had finished, its stance crumbled.

“Jizuri Suzaku!?”

Naomasa sensed something from the god of war’s shoulder as it fell to its knees and slid to the side.

...There’s thrust pushing at Suzaku’s back!

She looked back and saw the surface of some water. It was a fictional lake surrounded by sign frames. It was the power of “swamp” that the Suzaku controlled as one of the Four

Sacred Beasts.

“Is something calling you!?”

The Suzaku’s OS created several boot-up preparation sign frames, but they were deleted once a safety activated. The countless programs appearing and disappearing told Naomasa something.

“This is just like when Satomi Yoshiyori’s Loyalty took off...”

At the end of the Battle of Mikatagahara, he had said the designs and OSs of their gods of war were based on one abandoned in a battle with the Ming remnants. Most likely, that had been the Suzaku of the Four Sacred Beasts.

In that case, what would be causing the same reaction now?

“Is one of the Four Sacred Beasts here!?”

More than just fall to its knees, the sliding Suzaku was about to topple forward. The defense tights on its legs tore and the gravitational control rail joints of the knees contacted the floor. Sparks and sounds of bending spilled out, but the Suzaku’s OS forcibly maintained its balance. However...

...Oh?

Naomasa realized Jizuri Suzaku’s arm was swinging down toward her.

Of course, she had no recollection of ordering it to do so. Was she simply misinterpreting an action caused by the loss of balance? Or was this being controlled by the Suzaku’s OS?

She did not know.

However, she decided it may have changed a little amid the sign frames that were starting to vanish faster than they appeared.

“But the real problem is that.”

As the Suzaku’s arching curve along the Ariake’s roof armor came to a stop, she looked into the southwestern sky.

The explosion of fog was clearing up, revealing Hashiba Hidetsugu’s fleet.

When she had seen him earlier, Hashiba Hidetsugu had been a ghost boy with one dragon horn, but...

“So that’s what stopped the high-speed shell.”

As the fog cleared, a giant form came into view behind Hidetsugu. It was a giant god of war resembling an azure dragon. Several sign frames had opened around it and occasional static ran through it.

“Is that the Seiryu of the Four Sacred Beasts!?”

...*Eh?*

Someone had a thought within the wind.

It was Adele.

Hashiba Hidetsugu’s fleet was too far from the Yamagata Castle to see properly, so a large sign frame on the bow displayed a magnified view.

But...

“...?”

Adele removed her glasses and checked on the distance between the lenses and her eyes.

However, she concluded there was nothing wrong with the glasses and narrowed her eyes toward the image on the sign frame.

“Huh?”

Something was not right.

They were transparent.

The boy with a single dragon horn was a ghost, so he was a little transparent in the sunlight. She understood that was just how ghosts worked, but...

“The god of war behind him is too...”

The Seiryu god of war had held its right arm forward to block the high-speed shell, but its form would occasionally grow fuzzy, like static was running through it.

Gold Mar: “Was it being pulled out of some other space like with Schwarz Fräulein, but something went wrong?”

Smoking Girl: “Or maybe it had optical stealth on, but it didn’t completely come off? ... Hiro!”

347: “Ah! Sorry, but I can’t tell without seeing it for myself. And I’m not sure I’d be able to tell even if I did see it. Still, I doubt it’s optical. If it was, it should have immediately gone back up after getting hit by a simple physical shell and whatever spell was on it.”

Mal-Ga: “So was its summoning not set up right? But it did stop the shell, didn’t it? What’s going on?”

The answer was they did not know.

...But really though. What is going on here?

Adele leaned forward and heard Yoshiaki speak quietly while finishing her dance and maintaining her final pose.

“Poor Masamune.”

“Eh?”

Adele looked over and noticed that Yoshiaki’s shoulders looked a little slumped.

Then the fox noticed the girl.

“Do you need something?”

As soon as she asked that, the Seiryu god of war vanished from the large sign frame in front of them.

The giant god of war utterly vanished before Adele could ask anything.

And before she could react...

Worshipper: “Whaaaaat!? The god of war just up and disappeared!?”

Laborer: “We can tell that, so you don’t have to say it.”

Asama: “B-but what was that just now!? Ah! Kimi! Please don’t cover your ears and hide when this is all that happened! W-wait. Not between my legs...”

Wise Sister: “Heh heh. What are you saying, Asama!? A kiddy-looking dragon god of war just pulled off an illusion! This has to be the dragon god’s curse against those who cheated the dragon! If you don’t believe it, you can face the dragon’s wrath all on your own! Like the Toilet God’s Ultimate Electricity Technique: Bathroom Sandal (Shared)!”^[2]

...Oh, that's an original divine spell from Final Overthrowing III which has a lot of fun class changing.

As Adele recalled that, lightning struck.

“Eh!? The sandal?”

Adele saw the light of the lightning strike that suddenly occurred in the clear afternoon sky.

However, it did not fall. It was emitted in every direction from a single point in the sky.

That point was to the west, at the center of the Date fleet.

The light raced across the sky, but its source continued to create more without end.

This occurred on the Kawai Castle, the Date clan's god of war carrier connected to the Musashi diplomatic ship.

The lightning produced a tearing sound and it spread in every direction like ivy.

Whip-like blasts of lightning struck and scorched the deck. Blowing wind and impacts assaulted the bridge.

The light did not stop.

The light was so bright it seemed to dye everything white rather than just illuminate things and a few silhouettes were visible inside it.

The largest one was Urquiaga the half-dragon in a defensive stance.

He saw something at the center of the white light. Masamune stood there, but behind her...

...A god of war!?

He could see the dragon-like silhouette backlit by the lightning and he saw it tearing at its throat as if to rip something apart.

What is this? he wondered.

It had occurred as he descended to the deck after ending his battle with Narumi.

Masamune had suddenly held her mouth and bent over.

“Ah...!”

A tearful voice had burst from her mouth. He had thought something had attacked her, but then she had wrinkled her brow and bent as far back as possible as a great pressure appeared behind her.

It took the form of wind, but Urquiaga had determined its true form was pressure. He had seen the mist that was actually scattering ether.

That was why he had thought something quite large was being summoned behind her.

As he had wondered what it could be, the bright lightning had appeared as an answer. More accurately, it was an explosion of ether light.

Then it came. The god of war had appeared behind Masamune, either copying her movements or controlling her movements depending on how one looked at it.

It was the Seiryu god of war. It was the one that had appeared behind Hidetsugu a moment before, but...

...It isn't transparent!?

It was solid. As its definite weight shook the deck, Masamune took the same actions as the dragon-designed machine.

The hands on her throat powerfully and definitely dug down into her flesh.

“...!”

A moment later, Urquiaga heard a crash.

It was Oniniwa. The Oni god of war in the sky behind them crashed knee-first into the dragon god of war.

The two gods of war collided with each other, one standing and the other accelerating through the air.

A metallic sound was followed by repeated sounds of armor panels crashing together and raining down.

But it was meaningless.

With its hands on its throat, the dragon god of war blocked Oniniwa's knee with its right

elbow.

“_____!”

It roared and extended its right arm to knock the giant Oni to the deck.

Rather than the sound of heavy steel crashing together, it was the sound of armor sliding across the polished deck. However, Oniniwa slid his legs around to correct his stance.

“I’m not done yet!”

He gave a shout and a roar, but it was already too late.

The dragon god of war flew from the center of the light. It pulled back its right arm and raised its head like a cobra before making a great leap. It sent its right fist toward Oniniwa as he stood up.

The stance and everything else about the strike were a complete mess.

However, lightning surrounded its arm and the wrist onward glowed white.

“...!”

Its fist tore through the air. A ring of water vapor spread and scattered through the air, but...

“Masamune!!”

Narumi’s mobile shell flew. In the long shadows of the vanishing light, her Unturning Centipede pulled long mandible swords from the empty air. There were eight in all and her target was the dragon god of war’s right arm.

The vermillion jaws bit down with enough force to sever that limb.

They hit.

However, they were broken. The first, second, and third shattered and the fourth broke into pieces. The fifth and sixth split at the joints and the seventh broke in two. The eighth vibrated until it was destroyed.

By that time, sixty-four of them had been added and they drew a large arc.

This was no longer a slash or any other kind of sword technique. The dozens of meters of mandibles were going to crush their target. But the azure dragon spread its wings this time and light burst from all six of them.

“_____”

Its roar became forward motion and it changed direction.

It faced Narumi instead of Sagetsu, Oniniwa's god of war.

Narumi chose to face the blue speed head-on. She held herself in midair and controlled the thirty-two pairs of mandibles as they raced through the sky.

But the Seiryu was faster. It leaped in a straight line between the mandibles sent by Narumi.

The vermilion blades were too slow. The Seiryu's outstretched claws were going to hit. However...

“Honestly!”

Narumi hurriedly raised a hand in the air behind her.

“If you have a grudge against me, just say so, Masamune.”

Unturning Centipede grabbed the hilts ejected into its hands and prepared to use them as a counterattack.

But a sudden voice rang out. It came from the Musashi's ambassador.

“You can't!!”

Oniniwa did not understand what had happened.

“Mh...”

He was looking forward.

He was on the deck of the Date clan's god of war carrier. That was where he had originally been, but the scene had changed.

The Seiryu god of war had vanished and the ether light surrounding it had been entirely annihilated.

Not much time had passed. According to his god of war's memory records, only three seconds has passed since he had stood up and this silence had filled his surroundings.

It was enough time to die, but still not a particularly long span of time.

However, they were alive. He could see the deck with the mark he had left while sliding along it and he saw the bridge rising up beyond the deck. The sky was blue and the white light was nowhere to be seen.

The god of war shaped like an azure dragon was nowhere to be found. It had disappeared.

The only movement was the wind.

He looked up into the sky as if seeking the wind blowing down from there, but Narumi was not there.

“Narumi. ...Did she die?”

“I’m alive. I’m behind you. ...But don’t turn around.”

“Don’t ask the impossible. My god of war has a wide range of vision.”

“And I’m in Sagetsu’s small blind spot right now.”

“I see.”

The god of war’s artificial sensation processing handled the sigh he could not express as just the machine.

...But...

A single thought came to mind.

...Masamune triggered that, didn’t she?

He looked straight ahead and found Masamune collapsed below the bridge. Musashi’s ambassador sat on the deck, supporting slender Masamune and holding the Date Chancellor’s hand between both of her own.

That bangs girl simply embraced Masamune and gently shook her in an attempt to wake her.

Then she called out to the unconscious girl.

“A-are you...okay? ...Are you?”

When the Seiryu had appeared, Suzu had not known what was happening.

She had sensed a sudden sound, a sudden wind, a sudden shaking, and all sorts of danger.

Plus...

...Date's...VI...P...

She thought her name was Masamune. The girl had seemed to be suffering. She had bent back, bent forward, squeezed her own body tightly, and cried out.

Suzu would be lying if she said it had not scared her. But another thought had come to mind too.

...So much pain.

That thought was not about herself. It was about something inside Masamune.

She could not sense it and it may have been something she would have easily understood if she could see, but she had simply felt like the girl was suffering from something inside her.

Pain held power.

That was why people struggled and gave up. There were times when people could struggle and times when they could not keep up the fight to the end. There were also times when people could give up and times when they could not.

Whatever was inside this girl – whatever its shape, whatever its size, and whatever its temperature – did it hurt? Suzu did not know, but she knew there was something she could do.

She knew what she could do for someone who was worried and who could not see their surroundings.

...Just like Toori-kun and Horizon did for me.

“Um.”

No. That quiet voice would not get through with all the noise around her. So...

“U...um!”

She spoke loudly, or at least as loudly as when singing for class. She raised her voice because she wanted to do something about the girl's cries and pain.

“You can't!”

She called to her and for a brief time that girl turned to face her.

Good, thought Suzu. She noticed me.

But then the girl went limp and collapsed. That was why Suzu quickly supported her, but...

“It’s...going to be...all right...okay?”

By the time she questioned the girl, sat down with her in her arms, and held her hand, Suzu noticed the change to her surroundings.

The area had quieted down and heat had returned to the sky.

Urquiaga sensed the color blue and the normal wind. He had a single thought as he spread his wings in the sky and prepared the ejection ports in his legs.

...When Mukai calmed Masamune down, the Seiryu vanished?

He did not really understand, but the Seiryu had vanished after Mukai’s shout of “you can’t”. And...

“Could you...let go of me?”

The object in his right arm spoke to him. It was the draconic mobile shell named Unturning Centipede. The mobile shell had released its right leg and right arm and it twisted its body around.

“What do you think you’re doing?”

“You can’t tell?” he asked. “I saved your life.”

“I didn’t ask you to do that.”

“Then,” he said. “You intended to die.”

“_____”

“Well, anyway...”

He looked to a collapsed form. It was the person who had been standing with Suzu by the bridge.

“Masamune!” shouted Narumi.

“Pipe down. First you assume death and then you try to save someone. How can I trust you?”

“Then what about you? You fought me and then saved me...”

“My actions are perfectly consistent. ...They always lead toward conquering the elder sister character.”

The one-legged Unturning Centipede kned him with a “Why you...!” for good measure.

“You are the worst!” said Narumi. “So you only fought me and saved me to show off to Masamune?”

“Heh. ...If you want to think of it as scoring points, I won’t stop you. The fact remains that I am making gradual progress.”

Unturning Centipede resisted, but she barely did any damage since he had adjusted his grip on her waist. Meanwhile, he looked to Masamune collapsed on the deck.

However, his thoughts were not focused on her.

...What was that god of war?

It had resembled a dragon and it had been identical to another one: the one far, far from here he had only been able to see using his half-dragon vision.

“That was the same one that appeared behind Hashiba Hidetsugu, wasn’t it?”

Out of the corner of her eye, Adele saw Yoshiaki lower her fans.

Her eyes were focused on the large sign frame in the sky in front of them.

It displayed Hashiba Hidetsugu’s ship after the staticky azure god of war had vanished.

There was movement there.

Niwa supported Hidetsugu as he stood weakly on the deck and she led him back inside the ship. However, the girl standing next to Hidetsugu stepped forward.

She was a ghost, so the girl was a little transparent with the afternoon sun behind her.

She was not human. The white triangles of fur covering her ears told Adele what she was.

“...A werefox.”

Adele recalled what Masazumi had said about Mogami sending Yoshiaki’s daughter to Hashiba two weeks before as a hostage.

That daughter's name was Komahime, but...

...*Why is she a ghost?*

Her gaze was clearly focused on the Mogami fleet. She was looking at Mogami Yoshiaki. And...

“_____”

Komahime gave a deep bow.

“Ah.”

The footage on the sign frame filled with white light from below.

It was mist. It was the spraying water created when power filled the virtual sea covering the bottom of a ship so the ship could move. The virtual ocean allowing the Jurakudai to float was dyeing the sign frame in white.

Mal-Ga: “Hashiba Hidetsugu's fleet is leaving. They're being pretty calm about it.”

The white waves and mist scattered as the fleet slowly changed direction. They exposed the relatively defenseless sterns, so they must have decided Mogami would not attack them again.

And that was why Yoshiaki raised one of her fans and closed it.

The large sign frame vanished, leaving only the forested and mountainous land, the Ariake, and the sea in view.

However, no one was moving any longer.

“You fool.” Yoshiaki hid her face behind her spread fan. “Bowing after a shot fired to sever the bonds between mother and daughter? Show some independence, girl.”

“Eh?”

Yoshiaki froze in place when she heard Adele's voice.

“What do you mean ‘eh’?”

“Well, I had kind of figured as much...but you're really her mother?”

Finally, a tremor ran through Yoshiaki's shoulders. After a few breaths, she took one final deep breath, and removed the fan from her face. The smiling fox wiped tears from her eyes.

“Honestly...I laughed myself to tears.”

There was nothing Adele could say. Yoshiaki simply smiled at her with damp eyes.

“Is there anything you want? Snacks, a proper meal, water, or sake? Anything at all? For example...”

She paused before continuing.

“How about a meeting to set in motion the future of not just Oushuu and not just the Far East, but of the entire world?”

Chapter 41: Oppressor from Above

第四十一章

『上からの抑圧者』



いつの間にか
そうになっているもの
配点（見上げれば）

What ends up like that

Before you know it?

Point Allocation (When You Look Up)

It was a place of shadows.

The entire perimeter was covered in a window, but the glass blocked out the light. A ship's deck extended far beyond that window and the room itself had decorative columns and walls.

That was the large observation deck on the rear of the Jurakudai, a P.A. Oda diplomatic ship.

The fifty meter diameter space was soaked in darkness, but the center contained a light that cast no shadows.

It was bluish-white ether light.

It remained in the center of the cylindrical space without illuminating its surroundings.

The blue light was contained within and leaking from two beds. Their harp-like forms were decorated with moons and the wind. One was empty, but a ghost girl stood next to the other and inside it...

“Hidetsugu-sama...”

The boy with a single dragon horn lay on the bed with his eyes closed. His feet faded away to show he was a ghost and his illusory body was soaking in the blue ether light leaking from the bottom end of the bed.

That ether light enveloped him and pulsated.

The ghost girl watching him was of course Komahime.

She peered down at him and spoke.

“Do you think I’ve made my mother hate me? She started firing on Date and Sviet Rus as Mogami instead of a subordinate to Hashiba.”

She tilted her head and smiled as she asked the sleeping boy her questions.

“What do you think that final shot meant...?”

However, her question fell apart as she asked it. The ends of her eyebrows drooped weakly.

“I know you’re not going to answer. This was forced from the beginning. You didn’t have many regrets.”

She forced a smile and raised her falling head. Then her hand reached the bed on which Hidetsugu slept.

The light supported her. It passed along the hand on the edge of the bed, circled around her entire body, and...

“Ah.”

Her form wavered. Her ears moved to the side, her fox appearance grew stronger, and two tails pushed out from the butt of the inner suit made of a special material for ghosts. The shape of her hands and the slant of her mouth gently rose.

“_____”

She trembled and stepped back from the bed. However, her left hand shook and did not come with her. She quickly swung her shoulder and grabbed her left arm with her right hand to pull the hand away. And finally...

“...I’m back to normal.”

The ears remained, but as far as she could see in the mirror she held, the slant of her mouth and cheeks had vanished. “It would look fine if I had my mother’s face,” she muttered while fixing the butt of her suit.

“Are you okay? There was a zap just now, so you probably shouldn’t touch that too much.”

Someone stepped in from the stairway up to the observation deck.

It was a woman in a simple P.A. Oda uniform with her hair worn up.

“Niwa-sama...”

Komahime noticed a slightly harsh tone to her voice, so she bowed.

“Sorry. You are looking after me, but I can’t seem to manage myself properly.”

“Shaja. It’s fine, it’s fine. No one can manage themselves properly, so don’t worry about it. And even if you could manage yourself, something weird would happen to throw it all out of

whack. ...More importantly, how about we head down to the bridge for another round of piloting practice to get your mind off all this? The captain praised you, saying another two rounds and you would have the skill needed for a temporary license.”

“Thank you very much. It was only in charge of supplies, but I was given a fleet back in Mogami. ...And I’m jealous of how quickly you can change your attitude, Niwa-sama.”

Niwa was acting quite differently from when she had been speaking so harshly toward Musashi and the Oushuu forces. There was a smile on her face and there was real life to it. It was not just for show.

She could readily switch between combat and normal times.

...Date’s Katakura also switched back and forth pretty spectacularly...

Komahime had a feeling that one had more to do with being crazy, but if he could do *that* sort of thing during battle, maybe he was just *that* sort of person. And there was something severely wrong when demonstratives were the only words one could use to describe him.

But Niwa took a breath and looked to Hidetsugu’s bed and the form sleeping on it.

“I do feel bad about all this. ...He still exists as a ghost, but his consciousness isn’t entirely there. For our purposes, he’s become something like a doll.”

“Why don’t you call that convenient?”

Komahime felt she was going too far and being too harsh, but she asked anyway.

“P.A. Oda is a wonderful place,” replied Niwa. “If he was only conscious, I am confident I could get him to side with us. I am #2 of the Five Great Peaks after all.”

“Sorry for being so conceited.”

“It’s fine, it’s fine.” Niwa smiled. “It’s true he’ll do whatever we tell him to, but we can only tell him to walk or to stop. Personally, I’d prefer it if he was conscious. That would make us a lot more convincing. But...”

“But?”

“Being a girl is tough at times like this.”

Niwa crossed her arms and lowered her shoulders while speaking like she could see everything about Komahime.

“Normally, I think a girl on your level would be letting go of everything from the past to

prepare yourself for the search for the next person.”

“Oh.” A thought came to Komahime and she realized she was smiling bitterly. “When she thought it was about time for me to leave Mogami, my mother had me choose which of my old possessions I couldn’t take with me. That was really, really hard.”

“She probably wanted you to let go of your regrets and gain a freedom with no bonds tying you to your family. You were going to leave your inherited name eventually and that was one way of doing that. ...Mogami’s leader is kind yet cruel.”

Niwa nodded toward Komahime with a smile.

“Foxes care for their families, but the parent and the child eventually part ways. ...When the child is making their own family, the aged parent would only be a hindrance after all.”

“If either of us is a hindrance, it’s me...”

After saying that, Komahime realized something, quickly took a step back, and bowed.

“Sorry! I’m on this side now, aren’t I!?”

“We aren’t divided between enemy and ally right now, so it’s fine. Just make sure you stick with us when we are.”

Niwa shrugged, looked over to Hidetsugu’s bed, and sighed

“Hashiba seems to be feeling pretty down about this.”

“Hashiba-sama is?”

“Shaja.Hashiba is a very calculating-...no, that’s not quite right. Maybe I should say she’s almost too good at making choices. She actually thought that would minimize the sacrifices. It’s just that there are several different ways of minimizing sacrifices and she has a habit of choosing one of them.”

“You mean...?”

“Shaja.” Niwa faced Komahime again. “Instead of distributing the sacrifice out to as many people as possible, she tries to place it all on a single person who can handle it.”

Niwa lowered her eyebrows a little and brushed up her hair.

“She places that role on herself quite frequently. And given what is to come, the rest of us usually do whatever we can to keep her from simply working behind the scenes. But at times, she decides someone else is the same as her. ...No, she decides that other person is different

from her, but she assumes they'll be fine taking on that much."

"Um," said Komahime as she took half a step forward. "I am fine."

She glanced over at Hidetsugu on the bed, but Niwa shook her head.

"You are not fine. After all..."

Niwa looked up and Komahime followed suit. Something was visible behind and over Hidetsugu's head.

Something like blue ripples was floating there like a mirror and something with no physical form was silently extending from it.

"A mechanical arm..."

It was a god of war arm. The blue draconic arm did not have a physical form as it occasionally appeared from the rippling surface.

As it had no physical form, it looked like a mere trick of the light, but its size and movements did not vanish altogether.

"That thing is trouble."

Niwa avoided the wavering ether light that slowly formed the god of war arm. She tilted her head away from the rippling line of light.

"Day in and day out, it grows more solid. It's sucking up more and more of the ether that bed is supposed to be supplying Hidetsugu, so the Jurakudai's fuel manager is going ballistic."

"Sorry..."

"Heh heh. Apologizing for her husband's imperfections is a good habit for a wife."

"No, um, that's not what I, um..."

Komahime trailed off when she noticed the amused bend of Niwa's eyes and the lack of strength in her eyebrows.

"Lady Komahime," said the woman. "You left some regrets in this world. So did Hidetsugu. That is why you both retained so much of your form as ghosts. But for some reason, your regrets did not fit well together..."

Niwa stopped there, looked to the unmoving dragon horn boy, and simply nodded.

“You are not fine. ...And Hashiba agrees with me.”

“Hashiba-sama does?”

“Shaja.” Niwa nodded again. “That is why she hasn’t returned here. She doesn’t know what to say to you. She’s feeling down because she thinks she should have placed more of the burden on herself. Yet if she keeps thinking like that, it’ll interfere with what’s to come.”

Four silhouettes parted ways in the sky.

The main fleets of Hashiba, Sviet Rus, Mogami, and Date were returning to their homes or the castles where their main academies were.

Date moved north, Mogami north-northwest, Sviet Rus west, and...

“P.A. Oda is going south to Edo.”

Masazumi looked in all four directions and then into the sky directly overhead.

She saw the rectangular shape of the armored diplomatic ship she needed to return to the Musashi.

“We need to get ourselves ready on the Musashi. This situation is urgent.”

“Heh heh. We’ve already been rushing things plenty. What good will rushing things even further do?”

Unfortunately, Masazumi could not deny they had been rushing things. But Hidetsugu had arrived to monitor things for Hashiba and Mogami had shown a refusal to obey.

“The balance of power Hashiba created across Oushuu, Kantou, and Sviet Rus might just collapse.”

“Hm? What makes you say that, Masazumi?”

“I’ll explain later. If possible, I want to gain a consensus on that and some other things with the diplomats we sent out to the three nations.”

She had a lot to think about. Or rather, the number of things to think about had just grown significantly.

And that included a lot to worry about.

...Will Futayo be all right with her injuries?

She had been sent back to the Ariake ahead of the others, but that meant their Vice Chancellor had lost to Hashiba. The people on the Ariake would not have been able to see it, but the people in the village of Mito had seen it.

There was also the false information about Futayo being attacked aboard the Musashi from before. Everyone would still remember that, so this new information would be truly dangerous if it reached their ears.

Masazumi had made sure to instruct Ookubo and the PR Committee to report that there was a problem with the Tonbo Spare, but that she had driven off Hashiba's Ten Spears with some help from the 5th Special Duty Officer and others. If anyone insisted the Vice Chancellor had lost, they just had to heal Futayo's wounds and let everyone see the girl unharmed.

And the coming negotiations with the three nations would be a major enough event to erase that smaller incident from people's minds. So...

"The question is how to handle the negotiations with the three nations."

"In your opinion, Masazumi, when will that be?"

Masazumi responded to Asama's question by looking up into the sky where the three fleets of those nations were only tiny dots in different directions.

Even if they returned to their headquarters, they would still need to regroup themselves after the day's events.

"A lot happened, so I doubt they will finish that today. I have to preface this with 'most likely', but I doubt the three nations will want any other nation getting ahead of them. It will almost certainly be tomorrow night."

"I see. Then should I secure a line to use in case we need to do a real-time broadcast tomorrow night? ...Huh?"

Asama looked at the sign frame by her hand and tilted her head.

"I just got a divine mail from my dad. It says 'spend the night over there'."

"Heh heh heh. Way to go, Asama dad! Is he handing over his daughter's hand before she's even married!? Or is it a test to see if she'll fit in one of my foolish brother's concubine slots!? If so, we'll get the following stat increases: Spiritual+5 Shooting+99 Impurity+66. So we'll need to shove Suzu in there too to bring down the impurity levels!! Let's get testing!"

“Stop deciding things for me!”

Asama blushed with her eyebrows raised and pointed toward the Aoi Sister and the Ariake.

“My dad only said to stay there! Besides, a shrine maiden has nothing to do with impurity! ... Hm? What is it, Hanami? What’s that new meter?”

Hanami could not look Asama in the eye and closed a few sign frames displaying meters.

When Asama noticed, she eventually tapped Hanami on the back, but the Mouse continued working and did not turn around. There were simply too many of them to close.

“What a hardworking Mouse.”

“I feel like she’s gotten especially hardworking lately...”

Meanwhile, a wind blew in. It was the diplomatic ship arriving. Masazumi breathed a silent sigh of relief that they were finally moving on to the next stage. At the very least, she felt they had what they needed to get things moving. But...

“Hey!”

Someone leaned over the edge of the diplomatic ship. It was Naomasa.

Is she here to greet us? wondered Masazumi, but then Naruze in her summer uniform flew from the deck on her broom. Masazumi tilted her head as the Technohexen circled through the sky on her way down toward them.

“What is it? There’s too many of you and you’re too lightly equipped for bodyguards.”

“We’ve got some trouble. The Committee Leader Alliance has taken action.”

Naruze shrugged as she explained and she held her palms upwards as if it were raining.

“I’d call it a rebellion, but I bet they’re calling it an uprising to bring peace.”

“...What?”

Masazumi and Asama expressed confusion and the Aoi Sister smiled with her eyebrows lowered, so Naruze pointed to the diplomatic ship. Naomasa was leaning over the edge, but someone else was a few meters away from her.

...Students with rifles.

“Those are...underclassmen from the Public Morals Committee.”

Asama spoke slowly as if confirming the fact for herself.

That was when Masazumi caught on.

“So the Committee Leader Alliance that works for the Student Council is rising up against the Student Council and the Chancellor’s Officers.”

She knew why. She knew all too well.

Their defeat.

Since the defeat three weeks before, they had been doing their best to not promote war weariness among the people and they had been prioritizing the work on the Musashi’s modifications. In Masazumi’s view, the people had been worried but they were working toward their next move.

However, those who knew more of the true state of affairs were different. Most likely...

...Have they decided further war is nothing but a danger!?

Once she understood, Masazumi let all of her emotions leak out.

“This is no time to be doing that!”

“Isn’t it, though? For the underclassmen and committees who haven’t stood on the front lines, that is.” Naruze remained entirely expressionless. “They have control of and agreement from a number of positions on the Ariake and the Musashi. ...Since the Musashi is trying to leave port, they want to suggest to the Student Council and Chancellor’s Officers that there might be a different possible future for us.”

Namely...

“For the Far East, does the Musashi really need to fight any longer? They want to ask if we could instead end the fighting and peacefully find a solution to the Apocalypse. And to do that...”

“A special student general assembly?”

“Judge. I guess when you’ve got experience with those, you catch on quickly.”

Naruze’s expression finally changed as a smile appeared on the corners of her mouth.

“They’re asking if there is ‘a different future’ available to us. In other words, to end our clash

with Hashiba, give up on escaping our provisional rule, and to instead seal the Musashi here in Mito to live peacefully. They're saying they need to ask us that in a special student general assembly. And they are saying the conclusion reached after discussing that possibility is the course Musashi should take."

So that's it, muttered Masazumi in her heart.

"What about the engine division and the other residents?"

"Most of them are siding with us, but they say they'll support the conclusion reached in the special student general assembly."

"That's being awfully calm. I just hope it's because they trust us."

Just as Masazumi brushed up her hair, the Aoi Sister leaned against the terrace railing, looked up into the sky, and laughed.

"Heh heh. This is interesting. Instead of a coup d'état for a human resources update, it's a revolution for an update to Musashi's policy. Most likely, they don't want to be king, but they do want to change the state of the nation. Their primary policy is pacifism. By advocating not fighting, they can make you out to be the faction proposing war and themselves to be the faction proposing peace. Thus anyone who opposes them will be treated as an opponent of peace and therefore deterred. It's a clever method. Cheap, but still clever. ...But Naruze, who was it that made this gutsy decision?"

Masazumi did not need Naruze to answer. She already knew.

"It was Representative Committee Head Ookubo and Public Morals Committee Head Kanou, wasn't it?"

"How'd you know?"

"Because it's in the Testament descriptions. If we think of this as part of the history recreation, it makes perfect sense."

Masazumi sighed and opened a sign frame.

It displayed the previous year's Student Council election. That was less than a year after she had arrived at this school. She had been elected as Vice President during that election, but...

"Look at the other candidate for Vice President."

She showed the others the name of the initial candidate.

“Ookubo Tadachika. ...She dropped out partway through and shifted her focus to becoming head of the Representative Committee. With two inherited names and the name recognition from that election, people were saying she would be a good candidate for the next Vice President. But...”

What was this?

“According to the Testament descriptions, Honda Masazumi had repeated political conflicts with the Ookubos and eventually drove back the Ookubo faction, but he eventually fell victim to a plot by Kanou Gozen who was connected to the Ookubo faction. From there, Honda Masazumi never returned to the political world.”

Everyone gasped, but the Aoi Sister laughed quietly.

“But you haven’t inherited your name.”

“I never thought that would actually be a consolation.”

She could only smile bitterly at that. But it did tell her something about Ookubo.

...She is serious about this in her own way.

According to the Testament descriptions, the political conflict between Honda and Ookubo resulted in Ookubo’s fall. She had two inherited names and was said to be the best candidate for the next Vice President, so what would happen to her if she was outdone by someone with no inherited name?

She would lose everything she had built up.

That meant this was not a mere whim or a game.

“So we need to assume Ookubo is presenting us with the possibility she sees for Musashi and the Far East.”

“By the way,” said Naomasa.

She leaned over the edge of the deck and gave a cautious glance back toward the Public Morals Committee members watching over them from a distance.

Smoking Girl: “Neshinbara was attacked last night and there was the thing with Futayo. ... Do you think that was this Ookubo’s group?”

I wonder about that, thought Masazumi.

She felt like this uprising and those attacks did not fit together. After all...

...Doing that would reduce the legitimacy of their uprising.

But someone else spoke up before she could: Asama.

Asama: “I’m not so sure. It’s true something seemed a little off about Ookubo-san last night, but I feel like something doesn’t fit quite right when I think about her being behind the attack. ...Of course, I might just be imagining things.”

“I see.” Naomasa nodded. “You know a lot about words, Asama-chi, so I’ll put that thought off for now. Still, it’s best to be on your guard.”

“Judge.” Naruze nodded too. “The fact remains that we were attacked and being on our guard is the Chancellor’s Officers’ job. The rest of you take things easy. You have us with you.”

But...

“What are you going to do, Masazumi? If her dropping out from the Student Council election is interpreted as an early recreation of her fall from the political world, the only one making a serious fall will be you. It’s not long until summer and now we’ve got all this trouble to deal with. And when we don’t have even an hour to spare...”

Naruze spat out a “keh” and Masazumi could only find her incredible.

However, someone took sudden action: the Aoi Sister. She swept back her hair and spoke.

“Well, sending out the nicest diplomatic ship was the best decision for them. Are they ‘protecting’ us as VIPs?”

If so...

“We really are going to have to have a sleepover tonight. ...We have the meeting with the three nations tomorrow night, but before that, we have a meeting with the adorable children on the Ariake who are trying to usurp your authority and turn you into figureheads.”

“Most likely,” sighed Masazumi. What were the students supposed to do if they could not control the Student Council and Chancellor’s Officers? “A special student general assembly. This will be our second one in just the first term. This academy has issues.”

“This is a notification from ‘Ariake’. The Musashi is shifting from departing standby mode to maintenance standby mode. Once the transition has been made, please return to your work posts. Also...” The announcement continued after a pause. “In preparation for Ariadust

Academy's special student general assembly, the various committees are working to temporarily remove the authority of the Student Council and Chancellor's Officers. All effort will be made to cause no trouble for the workers, normal citizens, and normal students, but please await the special student general assembly while looking out for each other. Over."

"Ariake" calmly spoke in the sign frames that filled the Ariake with afternoon light.

When she heard those words, Isa was eating a late lunch from a bridge giving her a view of the engine division.

...A special student general assembly, huh?

She had infiltrated the Ariake as a normal citizen, so she would only be a spectator of that event. If anything, she felt like she could pull off more of her ninja work while that was going on.

"I guess it could work."

The topic of the special student general assembly would be announced later, but it seemed the committees wanted to criticize the members of the Student Council and Chancellor's Officers. Rather than replacing the leaders of Musashi, they wanted a general assembly to determine Musashi's overall policy.

...Although if they do change the policy, the Student Council will just be a figurehead.

This was led by someone with the inherited name of Ookubo. She had made a greeting on the ship-wide divine radio earlier.

Isa thought she had done a good job because after the initial greeting...

"As a separate issue at the special student general assembly, I intend to have the frustrations and problems of the normal citizens and students addressed. If you take those frustrations and problems to the members of the Representative and PR Committees, we will discuss their validity and work toward resolving them."

In other words, they were willing to hear the complaints of the normal citizens and students. Most likely...

...That must include the people temporarily living down below at the land ports in Mito territory.

By listening to those complaints toward Musashi's current state, Ookubo's faction could bring those people to their side.

And since the source of those complaints would be “the enemy”, the Student Council and Chancellor’s Officers’ position would weaken.

It was a lot like the diversions that a ninja would use in enemy territory.

A portion of that information strategy was already beginning. Even in the engine division, a member of the PR Committee wearing a bunny outfit had arrived in front of the torii-style bulletin board device. Everyone lined up and the guy in the front acted as their representative by voicing their first complaint.

“Why didn’t the PR Committee send a young girl here? Why did you send us some guy from the Mongolian Religious Talisman Kombat Club aka MoRTal Kombat? Are you mocking us with that bunny outfit? Is this some kind of challenge?”

“I didn’t want to dress like this either! But the Committee Head is a glasses girl!”

“Tch. Then it can’t be helped... But you’d better lend me your collection sometime. You’ve got one, don’t you?”

When the boy responded in the affirmative, the line of engine division workers began listing off their daily concerns.

“Crossdressing is fine, but it’s a problem when he strips and I kind of like it.”

“I liked the Vice President better in pants, so could she maybe wear those again?”

“I don’t care if the Secretary makes sudden heroic poses while he grabs a porn doujinshi in the bookstore, but can he stop smiling at us and saying, ‘This one hasn’t hit it big yet, so it’s still rare! Oh, you too!? You must have the same Sinister Sight of Superb Selection!’ That’s gotta be against the rules!!”

This place likes to keep things interesting, thought Isa as she continued eating her lunch.

Based on the weight, she guessed the bamboo leaf wrapping she held contained rice balls like that morning.

...Oh, these ones are cooked!

There were three. One had nothing inside, one had kinpira inside, and one had roasted chicken inside. There was also some sweet root and stem vegetables cooked simply with some salt.

Unlike that morning, she had been working, so she had been given a main dish with stronger flavoring and vegetables that were more flavorful and tougher.

...That's just what I needed.

The provided tea was a warm barley tea that did not forcibly erase the flavor of the food.

She was just about moved to tears.

The bamboo leaf wrapping said it was from Rarely Metabolizable of the Restaurants Guild, so she decided to check it out later. While she had work to do on the Musashi, she had not been restricted from living her life at the same time. She wanted to enjoy this like a trip when she could.

After all, it was possible she could be leaving very soon. So...

“Anayama.”

“Hm? What is it? Oh, I’m in the middle of some work, but I can skip out on that for a bit.”

No, you can't, thought Isa as she spoke with a ninja technique.

“I think I might be kind of on the side of Musashi’s Chancellor’s Officers and Student Council.”

It took a few seconds for Anayama to respond, but his voice clearly reached her.

“Oh? And why is that?”

“Testament,” replied Isa while chewing on the vegetables and feeling the flavor leak into her mouth. “I...”

She gulped.

“I’ve been looking around since last night and I’ve seen the engine division today. To be blunt, the Musashi is a great place for people who love machines as much as I do.”

Oh, the chicken's really good, she thought.

“I know everyone at our academy’s doing their best so I can’t compare our facilities and equipment to the ones here...but the stuff here really is nice.”

So...

“I want to destroy it if I can.”

“That’s a feeling I’m not sure I understand.”

“C’mon, it’s simple. It’s not mine, it’s really well-made, and it’s our enemy’s, right? So I can destroy it, destroying it would be a good thing, and I want to destroy it. So shouldn’t I destroy it? It seems like a waste, but if it’s going to be destroyed one way or another...”

She nodded.

“I want to be the one to do it if I can. This might be a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity.”

“Is this...love?”

“Yeah, it’s that mistaken idea that it’s a once-in-a-lifetime chance and if you miss it ‘I may never love again’. In a manga, that’s the type of guy that ends up having his heart shaken by a girl innocently approaching about five pages later. And it’s the type of guy that ends up liking rejections in stories once they grow up. That was popular in the temple burning stories for a bit, wasn’t it? There was that immediate punchline with ‘Clear my mind and even this fire will feel- arrrrrrgh!’ But the endorphins in his brain allowed him to endure the heat and he ended up achieving enlightenment as the temple burned down around him while he twitched on his back with a blank-eyed smile and double Buddhist hand gestures.”

“I’m sorry, Isa-kun, but have you been reading a lot lately? Is this Miyoshi-san’s influence?”

“Well, there was a whole bunch of stuff piled up last night. It was labelled ‘for trade’, so I can see why the other nations think Musashi has poor public morals or is full of child pornography. You can get hooked on this stuff.”

Isa then changed the subject.

“Anyway, I just rigged another three of the gravitational accelerators. ...If the Musashi enters gravitational cruising, the rear port side will go boom. But...”

“But?”

“If this rebellion or whatever it is works, we won’t get to see that.”

I don’t want that, she thought.

“Anayama, I want to see the Musashi go boom.”

“And that’s why you’re siding with their Student Council and Chancellor’s Officers?”

“Testament. If Musashi gets all passive, I’ll never get to see it go boom. And if it goes boom, it’ll increase the selling power of our name. Isn’t that right?”

“Hmm... That might be true in general, but my intelligence gathering ability might be more popular among experts and thus with the kind of people who would actually hire us.”

“I see... Well, if you say so, then it must be true...”

Isa looked down to the lower level and saw Mishina Hiro there. She pulled a morning rice ball from her lab coat’s pocket and took a bite.

“Hey, a lot’s happening, but let’s go fix the problems we found during that mode shift! If you’re free and have worked down below, come with me!”

They all nodded and replied with “judge”, but a few of them pointed at the bunny suit boy holding the opinion box.

“We’ll be down after we finish making our complaints about the Chancellor!”

Isa laughed bitterly.

“Ah ha ha. That Chancellor sure is popular. Anayama, you might just fail.”

“That Chancellor is in Sviet Rus right now.”

“Is that so?”

Isa stood up, folded up the bamboo leaf wrapping, put it in her pocket, and started toward the stairs down.

That was when a large sign frame appeared near the engine division’s ceiling.

It was specialized for video and it showed a room with neatly arranged tatami mats but little furnishings.

Two people faced each other diagonally while sitting on cushions.

“That’s that Ookubo person and the automaton named Kanou.”

As everyone looked up at the screen, the automaton turned to face them.

The yellow ink-style lettering at the bottom said, “An Emergency Audience from the Student Council Room: Musashi’s Current Possibilities”.

“Good day, everyone. I am Kanou and I will be in charge of today’s broadcast of Armor Piercing Room, the talk show that breaks into one’s true thoughts.”

She gestured to Ookubo opposite her.

“I would like to hear what Ookubo-sama has to say about her plans, objective, and topic for the special student general assembly she has called for, as well as what effect it will have on everyone’s busy lives. Now...”

With that, Ookubo turned around.

She bowed and then looked to the viewers. Isa looked to the black eyes behind the glasses.

...Wow.

There was strength in those eyes. She was not just looking toward the viewer. She knew what it meant to look “at” someone.

Isa’s ninja intuition told her this was probably a troublesome person and the girl’s voice descended from the sign frame.

“Judge. Everyone, I am Ookubo Tadachika, second year of Musashi Ariadust Academy and the head of the Representative Committee. I am here in order to ask you all something today. First, I would like to address the special student general assembly that will be held tomorrow afternoon at one.”

Isa listened to Ookubo’s voice while viewing her focused eyes.

“The current Student Council and Chancellor’s Officers wish to stop the Apocalypse by opposing the great powers of Hashiba, P.A. Oda, and the Testament Union. We would like to propose a different method. One that avoids conflict to peacefully stop the Apocalypse.”

In other words...

“I would like to propose to all of you the possibility that Musashi can both avoid battle and have world peace.”

Chapter 42: Protester in the Frame

第四十二章

『梓内の抗議人』



What is stereotypical

Yet not stereotypical?

Point Allocation (The Unexpected)

On the diplomatic ship floating in the Mito sky below the Ariake, Ookubo's broadcast played from the sign frame opened above the upper deck's garden.

A pond in the garden had been converted into a summer pool and Masazumi was reading at the edge wearing only a shirt and the bottom of a two-piece swimsuit. Her butt sat on the stones of the pond's edge and her legs soaked in the water up to the shins.

"So the Ariake isn't actually sealing anything off. That's probably to avoid any backlash from the workers and residents and to help build their hatred of war."

...I can't believe this.

The only ones being kept out were the members of the Student Council and Chancellor's Officers. Noriki, Ohiroshiki, Hassan, Itoken, and Persona-kun were apparently working like normal on the Ariake. The Tachibana Couple were also continuing as normal there. Shirojiro and Heidi had been let inside, but they were restricted to their merchant work.

There was no divine transmission restriction between them.

They apparently wanted to set this up as the Student Council and Chancellor's Officers versus the Committee Alliance.

However, Masazumi's group had been forbidden from making any kind of public announcement. As their statements and actions were the target of protest, they were being restricted until the following day's special student general assembly. The ones being protested were being detained until such time as they were judged.

"That girl takes things far too seriously. Take this and this and this."

The Aoi Sister wore a cream-colored swimsuit and splashed water at the large sign frame above the pond. The splashing water caused the floating sign frame to distort and Asama spoke up from the pond stone she sat on while managing the divine transmissions.

"Ah! Stop that, Kimi! Keeping that thing going isn't easy, you know!?"

"Then find a way to distract me. Like this."

The Aoi Sister pulled on Asama's leg and the girl in a white and red shrine maiden swimsuit produced a splash.

...They sure are full of energy.

But since they were normal people, that may have been for the best.

...A shrine maiden that rivals a warship gun and a normal person who can deflect an attack from one of Hashiba's Ten Spears, huh?

Just as Masazumi began philosophically wondering what a "normal person" was, something cast a shadow over her head. She looked back and saw Naomasa in a black swimsuit. She twisted the straw hat on Masazumi's head.

"We're counting on you tomorrow."

Naomasa then entered the pool with her false arm holding a tray of food. Next Naito and Naruze arrived in swimsuits that matched the colors of their Technohexen outfits.

They made quick flaps of their wings to make a long leap.

"Looking from above, this is the deepest part."

They jumped in with their wings raised as much as possible. A spectacular splash filled the air, so Asama and the others shrieked and fled the area. As for Naomasa...

"Hey! What if you get water in our drinks, you two!?"

"Um, Masa... This isn't my spring, so maybe alcohol isn't the best idea," commented Asama.

"Heh heh heh. Yes, your place has shown quite the hospitality lately."

Meanwhile, Ookubo continued speaking overhead. She was assuring the people there would be no change to the Musashi's current operations.

"Whatever the world chooses to do in the future, the people of Musashi need the influence provided by the nation of Musashi. That is why I believe we should repair and arm the Musashi."

That's true, thought Masazumi. Then she realized the foundation of Ookubo's policy.

"She's going to follow what we've started, but change the direction in which it takes us."

That was true of remodeling the Musashi, acquiring the Logismoi Óplo, and of ending the Apocalypse.

“We will continue what we are already doing. The budget for those actions is already in motion and even if that is reorganized, we cannot revoke Musashi’s position as a nation until the Peace of Westphalia. Musashi is not a small nation, so I am not saying we should change what we are doing. That will remain the same, but we must change direction on the political front in order to reach Westphalia in peace.”

“Oh? Then Milad-...Ookubo-sama, what exactly are you proposing? Give us an outline.”

“Well,” said Ookubo as she placed a hand on her chin.

“She’s good at this.” Kimi looked up at the sign frame while teaching Uzy the flutter kick. “She knows how to present herself, so she’ll be a lot of trouble. Flat politician, she’s a lot like you.”

“I haven’t the slightest clue how to present myself.”

Masazumi sighed as she rested her cheek on her hand, with the elbow on her crossed legs. The Aoi Sister pointed at her saying “That’s it! Right there!” but it was a mystery what she meant.

On the overhead sign frame, Ookubo faced Kanou and spoke.

“You asked what I am proposing, but I would like to ask you something first.”

That’s an odd way of arguing, thought Masazumi. Why ask a question when asked about your proposal?

However, she knew what effect it would have and why Ookubo had done it. She was implicitly saying that everyone already knew what she was proposing.

By setting it up like that, even a normal opinion would sound valuable. And even if it was an incorrect opinion, people were more likely to carelessly accept it. By making it sound like a foregone conclusion, it was harder to hold doubts about it.

...So what is that setup leading to?

Ookubo continued on the screen.

“Why must Musashi go out of its way to fight to resolve its problems?”

Ookubo slowly inhaled.

She faced the portable filming shrine held by a member of the PR Committee, but she did not

smile yet.

...I need to keep things serious here.

A lot of people would be seeing her for the first time. Looking too calm would make people think she was not taking this seriously. She was a challenger here, so there was something she had to say while looking straight at them.

“On the political front, I have determined that Musashi has the national power needed to maintain peace and stop the Apocalypse. So...”

How about this?

“Things are different than they were at Mikawa. The Musashi is being remodeled and has lost a battle, so I believe it is time to take another look at our current policy. After all, if we do not change that policy, we will be dragged into an unavoidable fight along with Oushuu and Sviet Rus. We have no close relationship with any nation at the moment, so I believe this is the perfect time to have this discussion.”

She said “so” again.

“Tomorrow, I wish to hold a special student general assembly at which we can debate with and make suggestions to the Vice President and the rest of the Student Council and Chancellor’s Officers.”

She inhaled and lowered her head just once.

She next needed to make a request to everyone watching.

But she would not make it right away. Everything she had just said and her serious attitude were still alive within the viewers. If she made her request in the same way, it would sound the same as everything else. It would lack impact.

A proper speech needed shifts in tone. After all...

...Everything I’ve said this far is essentially meaningless.

What mattered was that the people took her side at the special student general assembly. Everything thus far was nothing more than setup and meant for the wonderful people who had been willing to actually listen to her argument.

What came next was for the majority of people who only wanted to see the very end of what she had to say.

Those people had not listened so seriously to what she had to say. They had not truly

understood it and had simply nodded along.

How could she get those people to remember her?

Ookubo raised her head and looked straight forward, but...

“_____”

...*Now I breathe out.*



She looked ahead to the screen displaying her image, said nothing, and yet felt the relief of completing a large job.

She relaxed.

She even vocalized the sigh.

She cast aside her previous serious mood and tension in a way everyone could understand.

Then she nodded and smiled toward everyone watching.

Good job, she really did think while narrowing her eyes. *Good job listening to what I had to say*.

And with that in her heart, she only had one thing to say.

“Please keep me in your thoughts.”

She closed her eyes in a smile and lowered her head again.

“Wow, that’s just not fair...”

Heidi spread her mouth horizontally and bent back in the Marube-ya shop on the main street of Okutama’s surface residential area.

A sign frame from Masazumi opened next to her face.

Vice President: “Augesvarer, what do you think as a merchant?”

“Well,” said Heidi as she looked to the front of the shop. With his best business smile, Shirojiro was selling vegetables to the women still living on the Musashi. For some reason, he was rubbing his hands together as he sold the radishes and green onions.

“Ha ha ha. Everyone, today’s produce is ecofriendly and naturally grown! Just look! The tip of this green onion is so wonderfully green! Cook it and it becomes so sweet and delicious! A set of five is a bargain at only five times the price of one!”

Azuma: “But all of that sounds completely normal. Is that because there’s something wrong with me?”

Marube-ya: “I love how Shiro-kun’s sales talks run on pure momentum and transform him into an idiot! Oh, and just to be clear, he isn’t sacrificing his personality for money. Money is

everything, so we use it to draw out a new side of our personality!”

Vice President: “Um, sure... Please continue.”

Heidi let Erimaki manage the sign frame from atop her head as she carried a wooden container of natto in straw out from the back of the shop.

Marube-ya: “Well, you see? That Glasses Committee Head probably isn’t like us or you.”

Vice President: “Eh?”

Asama: “Um, Masazumi? She did set you apart, so I don’t think you need to get so depressed you collapse onto your side. Look, Tsukinowa doesn’t know what to do.”

Masazumi’s getting better with her reactions, thought Heidi with a smile as she lined the produce up in front of the shop.

“Okay! We just got a shipment of Mito natto! This is the fresh natto that our Mitotsudaira protected by barking and running those Hashiba bad guys out of town! It has Mitotsudaira’s sniff approval!”

Silver Wolf: “Lies! There were several blatant lies in that!”

Me: “That’s right! Nate doesn’t bark or sniff at things! She only smells the air when there’s meat around and she only climbs up high for a growling song when she gets all excited!”

Silver Wolf: “Um, my king? Some things are unavoidable traits of your race. Like smelling at the air when there’s meat around...”

Hori-ko: “Oh? Then Mitotsudaira-sama. What about this lamb kebab cooking next to the yakisoba?”

Silver Wolf: “Eh!? ...Th-that is, um, a vegetable! Yes, a vegetable!”

It seemed to be pet-feeding time for the Russia group. Heidi checked over the sign frames as Erimaki finished compiling each one.

“Musashi’s guard unit – in other words, the guards for the Chancellor’s Officers – is apparently treating this as an ‘internal incident’ since Futayo hasn’t done anything. They will stop any harm that might come to the normal people and students or if the normal people try to harm the officers, but otherwise – in other words, in a clash between an officer and a member of a Committee – they’ll probably treat it as a duel. That leaves me curious about the VIPs who aren’t officers... How are things with you, Azuma-kun?”

Azuma: “Eh? Nothing’s happening here. Besides, I’m looking after Miriam today because,

um, well, she can't move much since it's that time of the month."

Mal-Ga: "Your shtick really has changed. ...If you're looking for a new shtick, you can always consult me."

Azuma: "Then, um, Naruze-kun? ...Do you have a spell or something to lessen the effects of that time of the month?"

This had nothing to do with her, but Heidi felt a shiver down her spine. She used the power of prayer to send out thoughts of "Send this my way!" and "We can make a ton of money off of this!"

But...

Gold Mar: "Ga-chan, your nose. Your nose is bleeding."

Mal-Ga: "Heh...heh heh. Why would you do that again? You might as well be holding meat out while dancing in front of a bear just before hibernation... L-listen, Azuma."

Azuma: "Judge. What is it?"

Mal-Ga: "I'm pretty sure Miriam knows a way to stop that, so tell her there's a way the two of you can stop it together. See if she'll tell you what it is."

Azuma: "Okay. She'll know what I mean if I ask like that? Then I'll go ask her."

Heidi felt an even stronger shiver.

...Is Azuma-kun the kind of kid who can be kidnapped for a ransom pretty easily?

Marube-ya: "U-um, are we just ignoring all the officers that didn't choose to join you?"

Asama: "No, since I'm handling the divine transmissions, those ones are apparently cut off from us. There's really no helping it, though."

Smoking Girl: "Lately, I've been thinking you play a much more active role than I do, Asama-chi."

Sticky King: "She fits right in, so I see no problem. It's not good to say things that will distance people."

Obscene: "Agreed! Asama-kun is the ace shooter that fires us to our destination! She is most welcome on the front line!"

Asama: "Um..."

Mal-Ga: “Ignoring the lamenting shrine maiden, this really is a troublesome situation. ...The normal members of the committees are one thing, but the Committee Heads have a fair bit of authority. They can bring their views to the Secretary, Treasurer, and the Special Duty Officers.”

Wise Sister: “Heh heh. But those Committee Heads can’t directly confront that anteater owner, can they? They report to the Special Duty Officers, Treasurer, and Secretary.”

Marube-ya: “That’s where the special student general assembly comes in. That lets them ignore the Special Duty Officers, Treasurer, and Secretary and speak to even the Chancellor.”

“It’s a real problem,” sighed Heidi. “But I guess it’s good that things on the Musashi aren’t stagnating. ...We might be officers, but we’re also running a business here.”

Mal-Ga: “That’s the trick right there... We’ve been busy lately, but that’s why we didn’t notice the Committee Alliance putting together this event. Although looking back, things were continuing a little too ‘normally’.”

Vice President: “That’s probably because Ookubo is just that good at bringing things together. I’m betting the other Committee Heads don’t see this as that big a deal.”

Heidi was not surprised to hear that. There were some athletic types taking positions here and there with opinion boxes, but...

Marube-ya: “It just feels like an event has begun. It’s just that we’d normally be informed in advance, but this time we weren’t.”

Wise Sister: “Heh heh. That would be how normal people like us see it. This was well done. If they weren’t planning to cause a huge commotion, the preparations would have been low-key as well. They dropped hints here and there to let those at the Committee Head level know this was happening and they controlled the information so it didn’t leak out.”

Flat Vassal: “Can they really control the information like that?”

Vice President: “They can.”

That’s right, thought Heidi who typed up advertisements and made sales talks.

Marube-ya: “I think this was setup quite a while back.”

Probably so, agreed Masazumi as she thought about Ookubo’s true intentions here.

When had she started planning this? Masazumi could make a decent guess.

“My guess would be it was setup around the time of the Armada Battle. When we were fighting, when the Musashi was repaired, and when we were away from the Musashi, the Committees did a lot to support us from the side.”

“But how did they set this up?” asked Naomasa as she adjusted her swimsuit that had built up water inside it.

Masazumi adjusted her hat and nodded.

“Judge. ...We can’t spend much time on things right now. As the representative of the cities, she would have been the target of the students’ parents and they would have let her know what they thought about welfare, divine transmissions, the economy, and life on the Musashi. And of course, most of those opinions would be ones of unease. Especially when it concerns their children. But if the Representative Committee shared that listening work with the other committees when it related to their fields of work, the other Committee Heads would begin gathering Musashi’s anxieties and sending them to the Representative Committee Head.”

Meaning...

“After the Battle of Mikatagahara, we distributed the people between the eight land ports in Mito so their anxieties could not unify and would remain smaller individual issues. That is still in effect. ...But the Committee Heads who gathered those complaints are unable to view those anxieties as individual things, so it builds up inside them.”

“Heh heh. Just like an inexperienced village doctor catching all of the small illnesses of his patients and becoming horribly ill himself. They say the common cold is the beginning of all illness, but...wait, does that include sexual diseases! Does that mean catching cold leads you to do things in need of censoring!? Well, Asama!? Does it!?”

Masazumi ignored that sister, but then she wondered if the girl was like that around town as well.

...Actually, I guess I already know the answer.

“Um, the Committee Heads will understand just how dangerous the people’s worries are for Musashi at the moment. And that’s why they’ve left all the decision-making with the Representative Committee Head since this would normally be her job. After that, Ookubo only had to tell them that ‘after considering the people’s feelings, let’s confirm some things with and suggest some things to the Student Council’ and ‘this is our final chance to present this possibility to them’.”

“Well, none of that’s a lie. ...So she just changed how they would interpret the information?” asked Naomasa.

“That’s right,” agreed Masazumi. “She’s acting like we have control of everything, and that’s why the Committee Heads and Musashi residents haven’t reacted too much. This is not a coup d’etat meant to overthrow us; it’s only a suggested change of policy. And that suggestion will change this life of unpredictable battle to a life of stable peace. Things on the Musashi won’t change all that much, no matter who is right here. But...”

But...

“With Ookubo, they might not have to go through any more war.”

“It sounds like the deck is really stacked against you, Masazumi. ...I mean, you love war.”

“W-wait, Asama! I take extreme issue with part of that!”

“Eh?”

Asama fell silent. The Aoi Sister eventually tapped her on the shoulder and everyone in the water pressed their foreheads together and began whispering.

What’s this about? wondered Masazumi as Asama left the circle first and raised her hand. She had a bit of tension in her eyebrows.

“Listen, Masazumi. This is extremely hard to say, but...”

“Judge. What is it?”

Asama presented their conclusion.

“Pretty much every time you have a meeting with another nation, the conclusion seems to be ‘This means war!’ ”

Masazumi thought on Asama’s words.

...Is that true?

Was it? Could it be? She brought a hand to her forehead and went through her memories.

...There was Mikawa and, um, England...

She counted them up on her fingers.

“Maa?”

...Oh, yeah, yeah. I'm fine. I'm just thinking. I feel like my very identity is being shaken. I'm fine, I'm fine.

But why am I sweating so much when I'm so lightly dressed and have my legs in the water? Calm down, Honda Masazumi. You've always been a pacifist. Counting it up does seem to show a concerning past and future, but try to stay positive here. Yes, take a positive view of war. No, that's not right.

But she did reach a certain answer.

"Wait! Listen. Just wait, all of you!"

"What is it?"

She did not let their legitimately confused looks get to her.

"Listen," she said while raising a finger. "At the discussion we had in Magdeburg's Avalon, we didn't go to war with any of the nations at that meeting!"

"Isn't that when you announced 'We're gonna go crush Hashiba! Have a nice day!'"

When she heard Naruze's comment, Masazumi collapsed limply onto her side.

...Huhhhhhhhhh?

She felt like there was something wrong with reality or like her view of the world was out of sync with the facts. Meanwhile, she heard distant voices in the center of the water.

"S-see, Naruze? You were so blunt that Masazumi can't recover!"

"She really has gotten better with her reactions... And I think I can use that collapsed pose, so don't move until I've made a sketch."

"Hmm. Is Seijun singing a strange 'loo loo loo' song?"

"I am not!"

She sat back up, but that did not change a single thing about reality. Not that she had any reason to think it would. But she did want to try fighting this, so she said what she could.

"Um, I take those meetings and negotiations seriously, don't I?"

"Yes, of course you do. You're always saying confusing things...which always leads to war."

"Everything I do is for the Far East, isn't it?"

“Yes, you do everything you can for the Far East...which always leads to war.”

“I generally try to cooperate with the other nations, don’t I?”

“Yes, you do generally try to get along with them...which always leads to war.”

“W-wait! Why does it always lead to war!? I strongly oppose that!”

“That’s right.” Asama nodded. “I may have been the one that brought it up, but I don’t think Masazumi brings us to war every single time! So let’s not treat her like this.”

Naruze showed Asama a chart drawn up on a crop mark frame Magie Figur. Asama looked confused, so...

“If you add it all numerically like this and then list it like this, then it comes out like this.”

Asama nodded a few times and then faced Masazumi again.

“Understood. Looking at it statistically, you have been seriously doing everything you can for the Far East while trying to get along with the other nations...which always leads to war.”

“Are you all my enemies!?”

“Heh heh heh. But looking at it this way, you’re quite the frightening warmonger. Show the slightest opening and you’ll bring war to them.”

“W-wait! They generally bring the war to us! I’ve never done that!”

“In other words, you’re a tempter *seme*.”

She had never heard that term before but could take a good guess what it meant, so she decided not to think about it any further.

“Anyway,” sighed Asama. “Don’t worry, Masazumi. Tomorrow’s special student general assembly is an internal affair, so I don’t see how it could possibly lead to war.”

...Talk about setting a low bar...

But she needed to stay positive. If she could avoid leading this to war, that was a wonderful achievement.

...Huh? Why am I feeling so horribly depressed?

“Now come on over here,” said the Aoi Sister. “We’ve got food.”

“That’s right, Seijun,” added Naito. “You have a lot to do tonight, like putting together a strategy for tomorrow, don’t you? Then you need to relax while you can.”

“No, no.” Masazumi waved her hand back and forth before gently tapping her chest over her shirt. “I’ve never swam before. Okay?”

“Oh...?”

They all exchanged a glance and smiled.

Before she realized where this was going, she was thrown into the water.

Two people stood on a snowy hill.

Lined up in the evening sky were a demonic long-lived in an M.H.R.R. uniform and a boy in a P.A. Oda uniform with a black down jacket over the shoulders.

They were Shibata Katsuie and Sassa Narimasa.

The few ships of the advance fleet and people quickly setting up camp were below the hill behind them and both of them had some *insha kotob* open.

The *insha kotob* were for work and other matters, but they were both hitting the “approved” button without even really looking at them. Occasionally, Katsuie would speak up.

“Hey, small fry, take this work more seriously. I feel sorry for the people who made this data.”

“Shibata, the idiot next to me isn’t even hitting ‘approved’; he’s just closing the frames. I think the odds are pretty good he has no idea how divine mail conversations work. Yes, as the upperclassman, could you say something to that idiot?”

Katsuie looked to Narimasa’s other side, the side he was not standing on.

“Hmm, Naru Naruuu? There’s no one there. Are you hallucinating? Hmm, you okay there? If you’ve gone crazy, should I knock some sense back into you? Hmm?”

“D-damn you...”

Taki: “You two love that act, don’t you?”

“Oh, hi, Takigawa. What do you need?”

Taki: “Did you read the divine mail I sent you?”

“Shaja,” replied Katsuie as he showed his teeth to the female ninja in the *insha kotob*. “Ichimasu, things are getting interesting on the Musashi, aren’t they? First it looks like they’re going for a meeting with the three nations, but now they’ve got a special student general assembly? It’s just one event after another for the brats on that giant ship! I bet they’ll have festival stands out, so I kinda want to stop by with Lady Oichi!”

“Oh, then why not just go?”

A snowball hit the side of Narimasa’s face.

“Damn you!”

They both crushed snow with enough force to form ice balls and threw them back and forth at full strength, but they eventually took a break. As they did, Katsuie breathed a deep white sigh.

“Well, I guess we can think of this as Musashi peeling back the mask a little.”

“Really?”

“Narimasa.”

When Katsuie called his name, Narimasa pushed up his sunglasses and looked his way.

“Whaddya want??”

“Wowww! What was that ‘whaddya want’!? You push up your sunglasses like this and then...’whaddya want’!? Really!? ‘Whaddya want’!? This kid must think he’s so cool!!”

“Shut up, you son of a bitch! You’re the one that got all lovey-dovey while chowing down on the fruit tempura Oichi made! What was that ‘these strawberries are so good’ nonsense!? They had grated radish on them!”

“What!? If Lady Oichi grates it, a radish is a fruit! You didn’t know that, kid!?”

“Takigawa, can you do something about this guy? He’s a giant pain in the ass.”

Taki: “Yeah, Niu-chan’s over here too. So Naru-kun, you should probably just give up and play with Toshi and Michi.”

“No, those two are all obsessed with what Matthias and Hashiba sent over. They can get pretty nerdy, so I can’t keep up with them at times.”

Taki: “Why not find a hobby?”

“I used to have one.”

Shibata’s eyes widened and he pointed over saying “Eh? What was it?”, but Narimasa ignored him.

“I’m not telling you. Anyway, Shibata, you seem pretty cautious about Musashi. Is there a reason for that?”

“Shaja. It’s simple, you moron. What haven’t you done since coming to P.A. Oda?”

“Lived a trouble-free life under a superior who wasn’t an idiot.”

Taki: “To be blunt, you’ve been pretty blessed by your surroundings, Naru-kun. You haven’t dealt with any infighting since coming to P.A. Oda, right?”

“I do throw rocks at my stupid upperclassman.”

An ice ball with a rock inside hit him in the face, so their “snowball” fight heated up for a while.

“And isn’t it better to not have infighting? It’s a pain in the ass.”

Taki: “But the Oda clan had some during the issues over the inheritance of our master’s name.”

Inside the *insha kotob* Takigawa crossed her legs in her seat on the Shirasagi Castle’s bridge.

Taki: “The previous generation worked to combine the Mlasi forces and the Oda clan, but pushed a little too hard on that and had to retire to make up for it.”

“Shaja.” Katsuie nodded. “The clan split into two factions over the inheritance of our master’s name. Interestingly, I’m part of the main force now even though I was with the opposing faction.”

“Are you lecturing me like an old man? Please spare me.”

Narimasa sighed, shrugged, and turned his back on Katsuie.

“Could you upperclassmen stop expecting those of who came in later to do the things you all ended up doing? Isn’t it your duty to make sure we don’t have to do that kind of thing?”

Taki: “You sure take this seriously, Naru-kun.”

“Stop teasing-...”

He raised his voice, but stopped himself, sighed, looked back, and lowered his head.

“Sorry.”

Katsuie brought his hand down in a karate chop onto Narimasa’s lowered head and it clearly produced a dull sound.

“Ow! What was that for, you idiot!? You have no idea how to control your strength, do you!?”

“Then use that weak head of yours to think, small fry. If you’re going to follow the Testament descriptions...then Sassa Narimasa meets his end rebelling against Hashiba.”

“But before that and after we lose our master, I end up under your command as we fight Hashiba and Toshi. Hashiba will be our enemy by then.”

“That’s the whole point,” said Katsuie. “Your super excellent upperclassmen were telling you that it’s okay if you end up like us, no matter how it turns out that way.”

“What? Who are you calling excellent?”

“Don’t forget the ‘super’, small fry. Do you want me to create a human-shaped stamp in the snow with you? Do you?”

Katsuie laughed quietly.

“But that isn’t for a while. For now, we need to enjoy the situation we’ve got.”

“Shaja. You don’t have to tell me that. I was always planning to go all out here.”

The two of them looked north from the hill.

They were looking at an area several dozen kilometers away, past a large snowy forest in the distance.

“That’s the southwestern edge of Sviet Rus’s livable zone. There’s not even forty kilometers from that field to the city beyond it. We had an excellent guide.”

He nodded.

“Marfa of Novgorod, hm? She still looks down on everyone, but she led us in the right direction.”

Katsuie gave a nasal laugh.

“Hashiba pulled some strings to get Marfa the inherited name of Shibata Shigeie, right? So to ‘cooperate’ with us, she guided us into Sviet Rus territory and will prove her cooperation with a battle. And that’s just about to begin. Sounds good to me. Especially with the nice bait that’s shown up.”

He pointed his chin toward some shapes in the eastern sky. They were small and distant, but they were clearly there.

Taki: “Given the time, I assume that’s the Musashi diplomatic ship and Honjou Shigenaga’s escort fleet. I’ve recorded their cannon fire patterns and number of shells used, so should I send that over?”

“No,” replied Katsuie. “It wouldn’t get to her soon enough, and it wouldn’t matter for what she’s trying to do.”

Taki: “She? Oh, you mean Marfa.”

“Shaja,” responded Narimasa as he too looked to Honjou Shigenaga’s fleet. “Given the time, she should be making her attack soon.”

As he spoke, a wind blew through the eastern sky.

A shape suddenly appeared in front of Honjou Shigenaga’s escort fleet.

It was a black multi-layer warship that measured over eight hundred meters long. It was structured like shoe soles stacked on top of each other.

Taki: “Oh!? That reading!? Is that a stealth hulk? Now that’s rare!”

“I was raised in the mountains, so I can’t tell anything beyond its wafer-like multi-layer structure. Still, let’s see what she’s prepared to do. We’re not about to accept any half-assed ‘cooperation’. But...” Katsuie tilted his head and groaned. “I think that Marfa puts too much focus on emotions, strength, and connections between people. Well, that might be just right for such a cold region.”

Meanwhile, the black hulk flew toward the Honjou fleet with a few transport ships accompanying it.

It was on a collision course.

Honjou Shigenaga’s escort fleet for the diplomatic ship had noticed the enemy.

“Captain! Enemy detected eleven kilometers away to eleven and ten o’clock! The ether reading is of an old Sviet Rus Kraken-class armed hulk-type! The scan says it belongs to Novgorod!”

With that report, barriers opened on the left and right above the festival courtyard. These were physical ones, not spell ones. Toori tilted his head as they connected to the upper deck to keep out the external air.

“Hey, Shigeko? Do those cover everything? That’s kind of excessive.”

“Testament. Are you saying you wish to view the battle? ...There is a lift to the top. I’ll show you the way.”

“H-hold on!” cut in Mitotsudaira “What is going on!?”

“Don’t worry about it,” said Shigenaga while dismissively waving a hand and shoving yakisoba into her mouth. “This is the quickest way to understand the problem Sviet Rus is currently facing.”

“Eh?”

Mitotsudaira gave a puzzled look as Shigenaga opened a *sankt okno* and sent some instructions.

“Don’t let them pass by in silence, comrades! The time of demons is not yet upon us, so we must give a greeting to our fellow travelers. And let us bring them to a stop to teach them that this snowy land is not welcoming of outsiders!”

“So it’s hand-to-hand combat, captain!?”

“Testament! Listen, comrades! I’m sure you’re sick of using these cannons to fight. But the time has come! The time to display our great physical strength has come! The decorative flowers of cannon fire are only for the day. Once night falls, it is the crescent moon that shall decorate the sky! All ships, release your ceiling defense spells. It’s time for the famous Sviet Rus *privet!*”

As she spoke, the wind split apart in the sky ahead.

They saw the black hulk there. It belonged to Novgorod, but there was something odd about it.

It was upside down, so the flat upper deck was pointed down. And...

“The enemy ship only has its front defense barriers active! It’s coming in for the *privet!*”

A group of the amalgamated dead stood on the long upper deck of the multi-layer hulk. They were upside down, but they prepared for action at the stern of the ship.

And the individual at the very front was magnified in a *sankt okno* that opened in the sky.

She wore a black-dyed Sviet Rus uniform with extra decorations attached. An eight-legged horse made of bones stood to her side and the tiger-skin scarf around her neck blew in the wind. The very end of the scarf contained the two kanji of the name Kagetora.

Mitotsudaira spoke up when she realized what that name meant.

“Nagao Kagetora!? Is that former Sviet Rus Vice Chancellor and Novgorod Mayor Marfa!?”

Her tone of question carried a “but”, so she continued with a frown.

“Can we assume Novgorod has betrayed Sviet Rus and joined P.A. Oda?”

“Testament. We were keeping that hidden, but I guess the secret’s out now. ...To be completely accurate, she’s the former Vice Chancellor, she’s Mayor of Novgorod, and she was one of the successors to Sviet Rus. She was also a good friend of Current Chancellor and Student Council President Uesugi Kagekatsu. And now she’s an enemy and a traitor. She is...”

In the *sankt okno*, the woman’s expression changed. She brought her eyebrows together and stared ahead at them.

And Shigenaga spoke toward that gaze.

“Marfa ‘Vedma’ Boretskaya.”

With that resolute statement, the ceiling revealing both the sky and the enemy was closed.

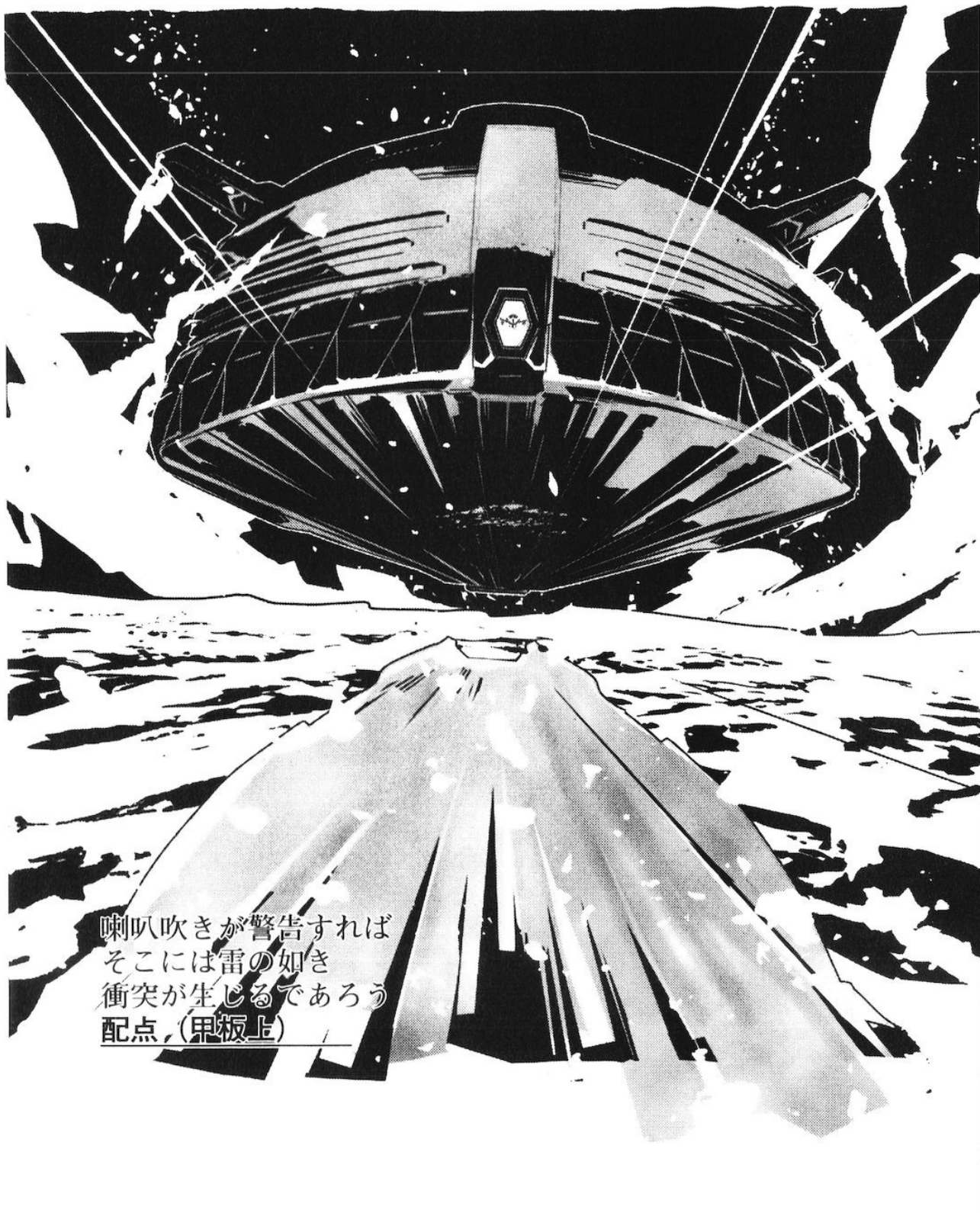
At the same time, a ship-wide announcement played.

“The enemy *privet* will arrive in two minutes and thirty-seven seconds!”

Chapter 43: Passersby on the Road

第四十三章

『路上の擦れ違い者』



喇叭吹きが警告すれば
そこには雷の如き
衝突が生じるであろう
配点、(甲板上)

When the trumpeter sounds the warning

A collision will occur there

At lightning speed

Point Allocation (On the Deck)

The sky was there. It was the orange of approaching night.

The wind was there and a chill was there, but one thing was lacking and Tenzou knew what that was.

...Our view of the heavens is blocked!!

They stood at the very back of the Honjou ship's deck. The Sviet Rus ship was based on a Far Eastern design, but the deck was flat and had a shallow forward slant to keep the snow off and block the wind. So when looking to the top...

...There's an open space matching the size of the ship.

Honjou Shigenaga and a combat unit mostly made up of demons stood there.

Standing among them should have given one a view of the entire sky overhead, but...

"Marfa's ship has a support transport ship below! ...Marfa's ship is approaching! It will reach us in thirty seconds!!"

That's close by, thought Tenzou. The black hulk floating upside down appeared to be almost directly in front of them. The sky exposed around them was already being crushed by the boxy shape of the giant hulk. Even now, the black ship's bow seemed to be stretching out toward them as it advanced.

Shigenaga raised her voice.

"Here it comes! Get ready!!"

It was indeed coming.

Behind Tenzou, Mary grabbed the sleeve of his coat.

"Is it going to hit?"

He shook his head to say no. It would not hit at this trajectory and angle.

Then he realized why she had judged this differently.

“Mary-dono, once we return to the Musashi, how about we add the transport district to our evening walking route.”

“Eh?” she asked, but she quickly realized what he meant. “If I’m used to seeing ships approaching, I won’t get so mistakenly afraid?”

“I was simply talking about the route I wanted to share with you on our walks.”

“Then we’ll have to stop by the transport district’s unique food stand that Lady Naito was telling me about.”

What a wonderful future, thought Tenzou when he saw her smile.

Gold Mar: “Um, I told her about that place, so I can lie in wait and spy on you.”

10ZO: “That’s just scary! Why does this Technohexen have to scare people like that!?”

They had a divine transmission connection with those in Mito, so that just left one question.

...What do we do here?

Marfa was cooperating with P.A. Oda, but since it qualified as a Sviet Rus civil war, they could not interfere as diplomats. However, an investigation by the Provisional Council had discovered no Testament descriptions of Novgorod rebelling after the purge. So...

...This battle is less a Sviet Rus civil war and more of an interpretation beyond the Testament descriptions. That means we can intervene.

That was why Masazumi had left the decision with them.

She wanted them to produce results if they could.

And now the enemy was here. The upside-down black hulk was charging their way.

Tenzou saw the structure of the battlefield. The movement was straight ahead and overhead. It was on the upper surface of this ship and on the upper surface of the upside-down fleet approaching them. They were approaching as if to push in at the vertical space between them.

The decks of opposite orientations were rapidly approaching and this created something.

“The decks are going to pass by at extreme close range!?”

Exactly that was about to happen.

As the wind of their relative speed blew through, combined dead warriors stood on the upside-down deck, but the ship moved to bring the two decks even closer.

“Get ready!!”

Shigenaga’s voice arrived just as the vertical gap between decks fell below five meters.

The wind was compressed, the vertical space shrank to about three meters, and fog formed only to burst out from the ships. The sound distorted, everyone’s bodies groaned under the pressure, and yet Shigenaga’s voice pierced the sky.

“Charge, comrades!”

“Testament!!”

The people standing in front of Tenzou’s group moved forward.

As if to accelerate the instant of collision between the passing decks, those standing in each other’s sky raised their weapons and rushed forward.

“Exchange the Sviet Rus *privet*!!”

Everything was running.

Both sides signaled their charge with trumpets. Those whose assault spears had trumpets on the shafts converted their lung capacity into sprinting and noise and converted their leg strength into speed.

The leg strength of the demons and of the combined dead was added on top of the ships’ speeds, so their acceleration led straight to a clash. The blaring of trumpets grew even louder.

“Ahhh!!”

The music in the front clashed.

Immediately, countless sounds of destruction rang out. Within that compressed noise, the armor and blood of demons and the dead flew through the air and the notes of brass instruments played clearly.

“Fill the gaps!!”

Before the cacophony of the clash could fade and faster than the fragments of instruments could blow away in the wind, the next wave of pressure clashed. They were attacking in waves. The assault trumpet spears had thrown the front lines into disarray, so...

“Sledgehammer unit!! Open the way!”

On both sides, those wielding mallet-shaped hammers in not just both arms but four or even six arms clashed at high speed. Their charge lasted only an instant. The number of blows was far greater. But they poured on heavy and destructive attacks while targeting the gaps created by their comrades who had clashed earlier.

“Take this!!”

The clash between upside down and right side up was built on top of the ships’ speeds.

The sounds were more of piercing than striking and a great variety of things sprayed out into the air.

But a path had been opened. Rather than crumbling, a definite opening had formed.

Due to the speed of the ships passing by, the battlefield never came to a stop. Both sides were forcing a clash at the front of the decks that were moving toward each other.

The rearmost forces of both sides were already on the move. They had great speed. And knowing that the enemy awaited beyond the holes opened in their battle lines, they followed those opened paths.

“Ohhhh!”

They struck.

Their attacks and defenses passed by in an instant and they were blown away. But they all bellowed the same thing in that instant.

“Zdravstvuyte!!”

They all exchanged greetings with their enemy as they blew them away and continued forward.

This was the *privet*.

“Zdravstvuyte.”

“Zdravstvuyte!”

“Zdravstvuyte, comrades!”

The entire battlefield was now a scene for attacks given and attacks received in greeting. Those intent on providing a greeting continued running. As for those who showed an opening or were too slow...

“Do svidaniya.”

“Do svidaniya!”

“Do svidaniya, comrades!”

The different-colored armor, shells, and blood of fallen comrades and of the enemy burst into the wind as they built up speed. The pressurized wind created between the two ships sent everything outwards. The two decks seemed to scrape together and that wind seemed to push their legs onward and their faces back.

They all leaned forward to break through that wind, lowered their hips to take advantage of their ship's buffering spells, and did their best to put up with the blow. But...

“Greet them some more!” shouted Shigenaga “It's the polite thing to do!!”

As they burst through the wind, their racing footsteps sounded more like thunder than physical blows.

They accelerated.

The sledgehammer units had left the ranks of both sides in complete disarray, so the next wave took a path to stab into the enemy's slowed front line.

And that wave was...

“Pickaxe unit!!”

“Testament!!”

Countless crescent moons of steel danced between the scraping decks.

With no restraint or guilt, the demons slammed those weapons forward while dashing. The noise was more of destruction than of metal. Some were pierced through, some were repelled, some were blown away, and some were beaten down, but...

“Ohhhhh!!”

It was all directed forward.

A great sound rang out. It was music. Trumpets played after them. The remnants of the assault trumpet unit could still give sound to their willpower, so they lined up alongside the advancing crescent moons, leaned back, and filled their lungs with air.

“_____”

Their footsteps sounded like peals of thunder. Fragments of music flowed out within it to maintain appearances. The music from both sides intertwined and finally found a common link. Then the speed of both sides noticeably grew.

As they accelerated, power gathered in the narrow space between artificial heaven and earth.

Just before it exploded, they all gave a shout.

“Come on out, main unit!!”

Before that cry could reach them, a group rushed up from the back of both sides.

This was their main force. It was their leader and that leader’s personal unit, and they formed the...

“Assault unit!!”

The passing by had surpassed the midpoint and both sides were seeking the aft of the other’s ship.

Approximately thirty people rushed in that direction. Shigenaga’s unit raced forward with her in the lead, but Marfa’s spear-wielding assault unit protected her and the eight-legged bone horse she rode.

Shigenaga saw Marfa running forward from the back of the battlefield, but she quickly removed her gaze from Marfa. She instead looked beyond the enemy.

“The sky is in view, comrades!!”

The scarlet-dyed sky could be seen beyond the decks moving in opposite directions as the heaven and earth.

Their greeting was ending.

Eventually, everyone with her looked in the same direction and opened their mouths.

“Testament!!!!”

An excellent response, thought Shigenaga while honing herself for the clash by taking a deep breath.

It only took an instant.

Marfa’s vanguard suddenly moved to either side.

“...!?”

The enemy made a sudden move in front of her eyes. They threw aside their assault spears and entirely focused on dispersing.

...What is this!?

They rapidly prepared themselves on the left and right, leaving Marfa’s skeletal horse defenseless.

“A spell firing unit!?”

Shigenaga mentally clicked her tongue as she caught on to Marfa’s plan.

...Just as we shift from mid- to close-range, she switches over to long-range spell firing!?

Shigenaga’s side had assumed this would be a close-range attack, so they could not react to a long range attack. Marfa had intended to ensure a successful attack by drawing them close before acting.

Shigenaga knew it had been intentional.

Even for demons, activating spells while running was not easy. If their speed dropped or they screwed up the spell activation, their front line would collapse. Plus, they could not allow Shigenaga’s side to catch on.

That meant this had to have been planned in advance.

“Did you set up this sudden approach and *privet* so we wouldn’t have time to prepare ourselves and put together countermeasures, Marfa!?”

Marfa did not respond. She simply shook her head to the side atop her racing bone horse.

Her tiger skin scarf danced in the wind.

That acted as a signal. While spread out in a fan shape, the enemy spell attack unit opened spell *sankt okno* while still running. They immediately received approval and let the power of the spells explode toward Shigenaga's unit.

Eight flame cannon blasts were fired and they easily filled the gap between the two units.

...In that case...

Shigenaga took action. She made a leap. It was a large step forward. Those behind her frantically raised their speed.

“Commander!?”

She ignored them as a way of telling them not to worry about it.

The enemy was already attacking, so...

...I have to make it!!

She swept her right hand forward and made her charge before the gathering flame shells could collide with everyone. That motion produced...

...My divine spell!!

A shield of light appeared. It was a rectangular Far Eastern tower shield. It was based on the heroic story of the historical Honjou Shigenaga blocking an enemy cannon blast with his shield.

“Honjou Shield!!”

<Multiple activation: confirmed>

Shigenaga saw her spell shield split into multiple shields. The light composing each one grew thinner, but a total of sixteen raced out to the left and right like they were being shuffled. They accurately stopped the enemy projectiles.

“Endure!”

They did as she wished. The flame shells exploded, but they burst out from the surface of the shields. And so Shigenaga sent her body forward to catch up with the outstretched hand.

However, she did not stop there. She bent her elbow again, and...

“Take this!”

By thrusting her right arm forward again, the Honjou Shield was launched forcefully forward.

This was a shield attack. As Marfa’s spell users moved forward and prepared their second shot, the shields collided with them and knocked them away.

All sixteen Honjou Shields scattered light and gave the narrow space a coloration different from the evening sky.

Shigenaga leaped in while Marfa approached on her skeletal horse.

As Marfa defenselessly kneeled atop the horse, Shigenaga drew her sword and charged toward her.

There was still some distance between them, but she accelerated forward.

“Marfa!”

Marfa did not reply, but she did speak with a calm look on her face.

“You are making me angry, Shigenaga.”

Shigenaga felt like the words stabbed into her.



マルファ・ボレッツカヤ

She did not know why, but then Marfa made a sudden move.

She stood up, reached around to her back, and pulled something out from behind her. It was...

“A Logismoi Óplo!?”

The giant black and white weapon in the enemy’s hand resembled a bow.

And Marfa did not stop there. She raised the bow and calmly aimed it.

It had no arrow, but...

...So this is what she was after!

Shigenaga was blown backwards by an impact more powerful than her acceleration.

An attack had reached her.

Shigenaga was not the only one blown away.

All of Marfa’s enemies – the Sviet Rus warriors on Shigenaga’s side – were knocked backwards by the sudden blow.

“...!!”

They were hit just above their heart. Some had their chests collapse inwards and some had their breastbones shattered, but they were all sent flying backwards.

Honjou Shigenaga was sent especially far. That was partially due to her lighter weight, but she bounced thrice off of the decks above and below as she was sent more than one hundred meters backwards.

It looked like they had taken a hit from a powerful bow, but someone directly faced all of the demons who had been beaten down.

It was Marfa.

On the battlefield of passing decks, she raced forward on her skeletal steed in pursuit of Shigenaga.

“Sorry I couldn’t keep my promise with Masamune and the others.”

That racing knight returned the bow to her back and drew a sword from her waist.

It was a long sword for use on horseback. It was an unnamed sword in an undecorated plain wooden sheath. Still upside-down, she raised the sword high toward Shigenaga who was trying to get back up.

“I will use all my strength, so let this sword strike finish you off.”

Without even slicing through the sky, the blade moved smoothly toward Shigenaga.

Shigenaga had yet to get back on her feet.

She placed her arms on the deck to raise her upper body, but the rest of her would not follow.

The previous attack was sticking with her and she knew what it had to have been.

...A Logismoi Óplo attack!

That was Maska Orge, the Logismoi Óplo of wrath.

Chancellor Kagekatsu had once told her what it did.

...Simply looking at the target of your anger hits them with an arrow strike to match the degree of that anger!

The wielder did not even need to fire an arrow. And the previous arrow strike had not pierced through her body.

“Is that the extent of your anger for me!?”

Shigenaga punched the deck to get up. Her lower body was still weak and her legs slipped below the knees, but she did not care. She faced Marfa as the woman approached.

“Don’t underestimate me!”

Shigenaga hit the floor to force her knees in close.

She stood up. She raised her legs and moved each part of her body into an upright position.

“Stand, comrades! None in Sviet Rus shall bow to a traitorous former Vice Chancellor! Remember that this icy land brings only death to any who cannot stand!”

“Testament!”

They all filled their bodies with the tremor of breath and attempted to follow her.

...Will we make it in time!?

Her heart told her no. But even as she decided that was the rational conclusion, she saw everyone around her moving toward the approaching blade.

Even if they could not stand, they desperately worked to stop Marfa as if clinging to her.

Good, she decided. Whatever happens here is fine as long as they maintain their stubborn spirits.

So...

“Marfa!”

She raised her left hand in front of her chest. Her right hand held the sword she had held onto even when sent flying so far.

“Aim here. Or am I so inexperienced that you have time to focus on others!?”

Her heart did not tell her “no”, but she did not know if that was due to her discipline or if it was a simple fact. However, she did raise her sword as if pulling at it with her right hand.

Her intent was to counter Marfa’s attack.

If she missed, she would die. Marfa responded to that determination with her straight blade.

But just as Shigenaga thought the attack was coming...

...!?

She saw the color red to Marfa’s left.

It was fire.

One of the spell users she had hit with her Honjou Shield had recovered and their fire shell was flying straight toward her.

She could not avoid it and she could not prepare her Honjou Shield in time.

Protecting one’s leader was only natural, so there was nothing wrong with this.

Shigenaga realized that the enemy was just as stubborn.

“Well done!”

But with that praise, she also wondered what to do. She had too little internal Blessings built up inside herself to use the Honjou Shield in such quick succession, but...

...I have no choice!

As soon as she made up her mind, a few shadows suddenly appeared.

Four giant boxy forms approached from the left and right of the narrow battlefield.

“Cargo containers!?”

A line of color was attached to each wooden cube.

That color was silver. They were silver chains and Shigenaga knew who used those.

“Musashi’s 5th Special Duty Officer!?”

“Judge!” yelled Mitotsudaira.

She named herself as she swung the silver chains to slam the containers into the enemy.

“I am Nate Mitotsudaira, 5th Special Duty Officer of Musashi Ariadust Academy’s Chancellor’s Officers. I will assist Sviet Rus to end this battle which runs counter to the Testament descriptions!”

The silver wolf swung her arms for even more strength and let loose a howl.

“Take this!”

Chapter 44: Parters on the Road

第四十四章

『路上の分かれ者達』



彼らは道を違え
しかし一つの場にいる者
配点 (複雑)

They take the wrong path

But they are in a single place

Point Allocation (Complicated)

During the greeting between heaven and earth, solid blows swept through, knocking everything away.

From a position in the rear, Mitotsudaira had used four containers to target...

“Those spell users!”

Her attacks arrived from either side.

Even if they were demons, they could not take a blow like this while preparing their spells. Something could be heard breaking when the attack hit and the enemy was crushed and misshapen by the hammer-like cargo containers.

The demon spell users were spread out to the left and right and the cargo containers flew in from either side as if creating a line to connect those demons.

“...!”

They were literally swept away. Specifically, they were all knocked in toward the center.

One of the containers changed shape, got stuck between the two decks, and spun fruitlessly a few times before shattering. But the other three flew forward and collided with Marfa’s comrades who were trying to follow her.

They were blown away.

As soon as the silver chains’ tight arms were free, Mitotsudaira pulled them back.

But she did not end it there.

A lift was rising from below the deck in front of her. The lift’s gate opened and something shot forcefully up from within.

“The fifth one.”

It was a cargo container.

Before the lift was even done rising, she kicked it up.

As the wooden container seemed to pitch forward in midair, it scraped against the ceiling formed from the deck of Marfa's ship.

"You're wide open!"

The silver wolf used her great instantaneous speed to kick the cargo container forward.

Her target was Marfa.

The ultra-heavy container tore through the wind as it flew straight toward her.

Marfa saw the intimidating mass approaching her.

Oh? She silently expressed her astonishment. *This is quite unusual for a privet.*

It was unthinkable and even a taboo in Sviet Rus's ways, but this was Musashi's 5th Special Duty Officer. It was acceptable as a greeting from Musashi.

In front of her, Shigenaga noticed the flying cargo container and ducked down so it would fly over her head.

Marfa realized she would reach Shigenaga just as the container passed by above her.

In that case, she thought. *I have no choice*, she also thought. She swung the sword in her right hand. She rotated her wrist to direct the attack straight ahead instead of toward Shigenaga.

"Say hi to Kagekatsu for me."

In a single breath, Marfa broke through the front and back doors of the cargo container flying right toward her. The power spell applied to her blade caused the doors to bend and burst with a dry sound.

A hole had opened.

If she sent her skeletal steed through it, she could pass over Shigenaga while inside the container.

And so she chose to do just that.

She would jump over her former comrade's head and move past her.

Just as she entered the container, she felt herself become separated from the surrounding noise and wind.

But even that sensation soon vanished and she started toward the bit of sky visible on the other end of the short tunnel.

“...!?”

That was when a cutting power reached the container from the left and right. The container’s side walls were smashed and twin horizontal attacks raced toward her from up ahead.

“Ex. Collbrande!?”

Marfa had no need to ask when they had done this. The two owners of those blades had likely been hiding while clinging to the back of the cargo container. The instant they realized she was passing through the container, they had jumped down on either side and made their attack.

Marfa took action by standing atop her bone horse in a surfing stance.

“Bear with this for a bit!”

She moved her left foot forward and forcefully pushed down on the bone horse’s head.

Its head dropped down as if pitching forward and Marfa bent her legs up for a short leap.

The two blades raced between the ducking horse and her bent legs.

She made it through. Her peripheral vision caught a glimpse of the ninja and English princess who had sliced the container, but that only lasted a moment as they passed each other by.

As the bone horse straightened back up, she landed on its back in the same surfing stance and she faced forward. She could see Musashi’s 5th Special Duty Officer in her upside-down vision. If she defeated that girl, she would have cleared everything.

There was only one thing to say as she stared at that opponent.

“How about I answer that greeting you gave me?”

Making sure to answer someone’s greeting in kind was the Sviet Rus way.

So while standing sideways to surf atop her skeletal steed, Marfa continued forward. But...

“...What!?”

A naked apron eating yakisoba appeared in front of her.

It happened far too suddenly. The naked apron did not seem to know what was going on either. Once he noticed her, he shouted “eh!?” and gave her an upside-down look of shock.

Marfa had no idea how he had gotten there, but he was an obstacle all the same. So she had her skeletal steed surfboard skid to the side. She had the horse briefly float up into the air to direct its path away from the naked apron.

The naked apron stuck with her.

...He's fast!?

The nudist had yakisoba hanging from his mouth as he moved so fast she thought he had teleported. Based on the “Ohhh!?” expression on his face, he did not understand the situation either.

Marfa ignored him. She had the bone horse hop the other direction to slip past him.

Once again, the nudist appeared right in front of her.

...How fast is this naked apron!?

Then she realized a silver chain was loosely tied around the nudist's body.

The nudist himself was not moving so quickly. He was being placed in her way by the 5th Special Duty Officer's chains.

“She's passing him around!?”

That proved to be accurate. As Marfa rapidly moved her bone horse to the side, the nudist was passed back and forth between the four silver chains on the left and right to keep him in her way. It was a high-speed form of juggling.

He was moving so quickly that she could see afterimages between the four chains.

Marfa shuddered at this pinpoint human obstacle and she continued controlling her skeletal steed and jabbing forward with her blade.

...This kind of strategy would be unthinkable for Sviet Rus!

She frowned at this decision, but then she heard a voice.

“Ohhhhhh! Hey! Naaaate! Yeah, I said I’d help, but what’s with this thrill ride!?”

“Um, well, I have other things to deal with, so I’m just letting the silver chains handle it!”

...So it’s just her artifact going nuts!?

Their handling of the obstacle seemed to be growing more and more careless because the nudist started to double over into a sideways “U” each time he was passed, but that did not change the fact that he was in the way. After all, Marfa had managed to maintain her momentum as she approached the 5th Special Duty Officer, but she was starting to veer off course.

In that case, she thought while giving up on avoiding the obstacle and changing her right jab into a piercing strike.

“I will eliminate the both of you!”

She prepared her right sword to stab through both the obstacle and Musashi’s 5th Special Duty Officer behind him.

Then she charged straight ahead atop her skeletal steed. But...

“A shield!?”

A large shield flew in from the side.

Is it the Honjou Shield? she wondered, but...

...No!

It was a Logismoi Oplo.

It was Aspida Phylargia. Musashi’s princess held it forward as she passed by the nudist’s side and charged forward while supported by a silver chain.

Marfa saw the shield-shaped Aspida Phylargia thrust toward her.

Her piercing attack struck the large white and black shield. But...

...Oh, no!

The impact definitely reached it, but she was familiar with Aspida Phylargia’s power. Sviet Rus had connections with England and even Novgorod had received information on

Musashi's clash with England.

Aspida Phylargia's effect as a Logismo Oplo was...

...To store up any received pain as Internal Blessings!

She mentally clenched her teeth and Musashi's princess spoke to her.

"I see. Your attack just now was based on emotion."

Then...

"It would have been better had that been directed at me, but this will do. ...I have stored up enough."

She reached her right hand behind her back, pulled something out, and held it vertically.

"Lype Katathlipse. ...Have a thirty percent charge."

With those words, an immense tearing raced through the gap between heaven and earth. It was directed toward what Musashi's princess viewed as the ceiling and what Marfa viewed as the floor.

"Here. Try this one out."

It scored a direct hit.

The impact tore the heavens from the earth.

Horizon had fired Lype Katathlipse straight upwards and it tore deeply into the deck of the hulk that Marfa and her side stood on. The tearing power slammed into the center of the hulk and could not keep up with the speed at which the two ships passed each other by. As a result, a chisel might as well have been stabbed into the hulk's deck from the point at which Horizon stood.

"Everyone, separate to the left and right!!"

After Marfa's order, her hulk was carved into from center to back.

The thick deck's wooden surface and the composite armor and cushioning below were torn away by fingernails.

"Accelerate!"

Marfa's order was immediately carried out.

But even the quickest possible order and response were too slow in the face of that immense destruction.

After the deck was torn into for a few dozen meters, it was pierced.

The attack broke through.

The bottom of the upside-down hulk swelled out along the path of the fingernails for a moment, but then it burst open at the back and was torn apart.

Then the depths of the heavens were visible past the tearing fingernails. Beyond the black storm of tearing, the dull sky opened up. That sky was not quite scarlet and not quite blue either.

The black fingernails stabbed out through the belly of the hulk, but the black ship's momentum tore itself apart as it escaped them.

There were sounds of scraping, gouging, breaking metal, and breaking wood. There were voices of surprise and...

“_____”

Of song.

As Musashi's princess fired her sorrow, she sang at one end of the destroying scratch marks that descended toward heaven. Of those watching, those on the heaven-side fled their vanishing footing and escaped into the sky. As for those on the earth-side...

“So that is...”

One of the demons lying broken on the ground by the *privet* spoke.

“So that is the Leviathan Princess...”

Marfa looked to the princess who sat in a seat of silver chain while holding her white and black gunblade like a harp.

She had consumed Marfa's means of attack and then destroyed her ship. Despite that and despite the fact that she needed to abandon the ship and retreat, Marfa thought to herself.

...So this is the power of those who will one day create the post-Warring States period

alongside Sviet Rus!

She could sum up the feeling in her gut using words like “envy” or “amazement”, but she knew this feeling could never be contained to those words.

“And that isn’t all.”

Behind the princess, the chains were still rapidly passing the nudist back and forth so he could be used as an obstacle to protect the princess at any time.

Marfa felt that nudist ensured that one had to add a “that isn’t all” to everything Musashi did.

She had listened to the battle at Mikawa and its conclusion on the divine radio. She had also heard everything about the battle at IZUMO and everything leading up to Mikatagahara.

...Yes.

Musashi’s princess possessed great power, but she had not been the one leading them. There had been many others deciding what path they should take and doing everything they could to follow that path.

But the one who had first decided to start down that path and still maintained the desire to follow it was that Chancellor who kept doubling over as he was passed back and forth.

Perhaps she should have directed her *privet* toward the Chancellor instead of the 5th Special Duty Officer. But even if she had not...

“*Do vstrechi*. Until we meet again, everyone! Until we meet again, power of Musashi! And when we do meet again, it will be a reunion and not a *privet*!”

The wind blew. Her upside-down ship was beginning to point its bow toward the earth. That was likely due to the stern growing lighter after the attack from below tore into it.

The light of ether fuel was spilling out like tears and breaking apart in the wind.

They had passed each other by.

The *privet* was over.

As the ship passed by, angled downward, and circled around to the front, Marfa stepped down from her bone horse and looked to her enemy.

Musashi’s 5th Special Duty Officer, their 1st Special Duty Officer ninja, and the English princess all looked back her way. Their princess had ended her attack and her song while their Chancellor dangled in a Y-shape from the chains holding either hand. And...

...Shigenaga.

Marfa's Masked Orge seemed to have hit that woman in the heart. She was holding the center of her chest and looking straight at Marfa.

"Marfa!"

Say it, thought Marfa as evacuation hatches opened across the broken and scattering ship. The crew was using those to jump down into the sky, but...

"Are you going to obstruct our promise!?"

Marfa did not immediately answer Shigenaga's question.

She slapped the bone horse's butt to tell it to get going and then she looked back at Shigenaga.

"Now, you've said it, Shigenaga. 'Obstruct', is it? In that case, I have something to say!"

She thought for a moment.

"...Actually, never mind."

"Damn you!"

"What's the matter, Shigenaga? I can tell you whenever I feel like it from now on."

Marfa only continued speaking after checking to make sure that the hulk's captain was gesturing to the others and escaping into the sky and that the other ships were moving in below them.

"Didn't I teach all of you to hide every non-crucial thought? And to only speak the crucial ones at a crucial moment? After all, any willpower that escapes from your mouth will sink to the bottom of the snow and disappear. ... You know the northern saying, don't you? 'Plant seven hundred seeds and not even thirty will bloom come spring. Allow a school to sink and it will lose all power to resist.' "

"No one knows what that old aphorism even means, but are you saying it applies to us now!?"

"Then," said Marfa as the deck grew nearly vertical. "Are you going to climb up on top of the snow, Shigenaga? Holding back for the dragon's sake will not fulfill the promise."

And...

"Say hi to Kagekatsu for me. Tell him he needs to act if he wants to end this."

That was the limit.

Marfa shut her eyes and threw her body down from the vertical deck.

Shigenaga spoke from the heavens, but Marfa could no longer comprehend it as words.

Her sweat flowed and scattered in the wind. All this activity in the light of the sun was hitting her dead body hard. Her body was growing stiff and she did not feel like holding down her disheveled hair.

...*Honestly.*

She did not even look up at Shigenaga's ship as it moved off after passing them by.

...*I pray the end of our winter arrives soon.*

Narimasa watched it all while alone atop a snowy hill.

A battle had been fought as two ships quickly passed each other by in the sky. Sviet Rus specialized in that exchange of fierce attacks known as the *privet*.

...*That really is pretty fun.*

Narimasa had fought on the front line against Sviet Rus, so he had experienced it a few times.

Their ships tended to have snow and ice over the deck, so they had gravitational control in effect there. They would pass by with one ship upside down, but based on what he had heard...

"That's supposed to be based on the knight tournaments that were popular in Medieval Europe..."

Due to the snowy and icy land, they could not place cannon turrets on top of their ships. And if they could not continue fighting for long, their battles had to come down to hit-and-away or one-hit win strategies.

That was where the *privet* came in.

In the *privet*, they could judge each other's strength, settle things there, or continue into a full-on battle if necessary.

But this *privet* had been difficult to judge. Damage-wise, Marfa's side had lost since they had lost a ship. But...

...Is this a difference in morale?

As Honjou Shigenaga's ship left toward central Sviet Rus, its crew was beginning to heal or secure the injured while the uninjured were staring back at Marfa's other ships.

Meanwhile, Marfa's other ships took on the falling warriors and everyone onboard formed ranks while looking a bit up toward Shigenaga's ship.

"It's like they have the winner and loser backwards."

"Sassa, why are you muttering complicated stuff to yourself? And where's Shibata?"

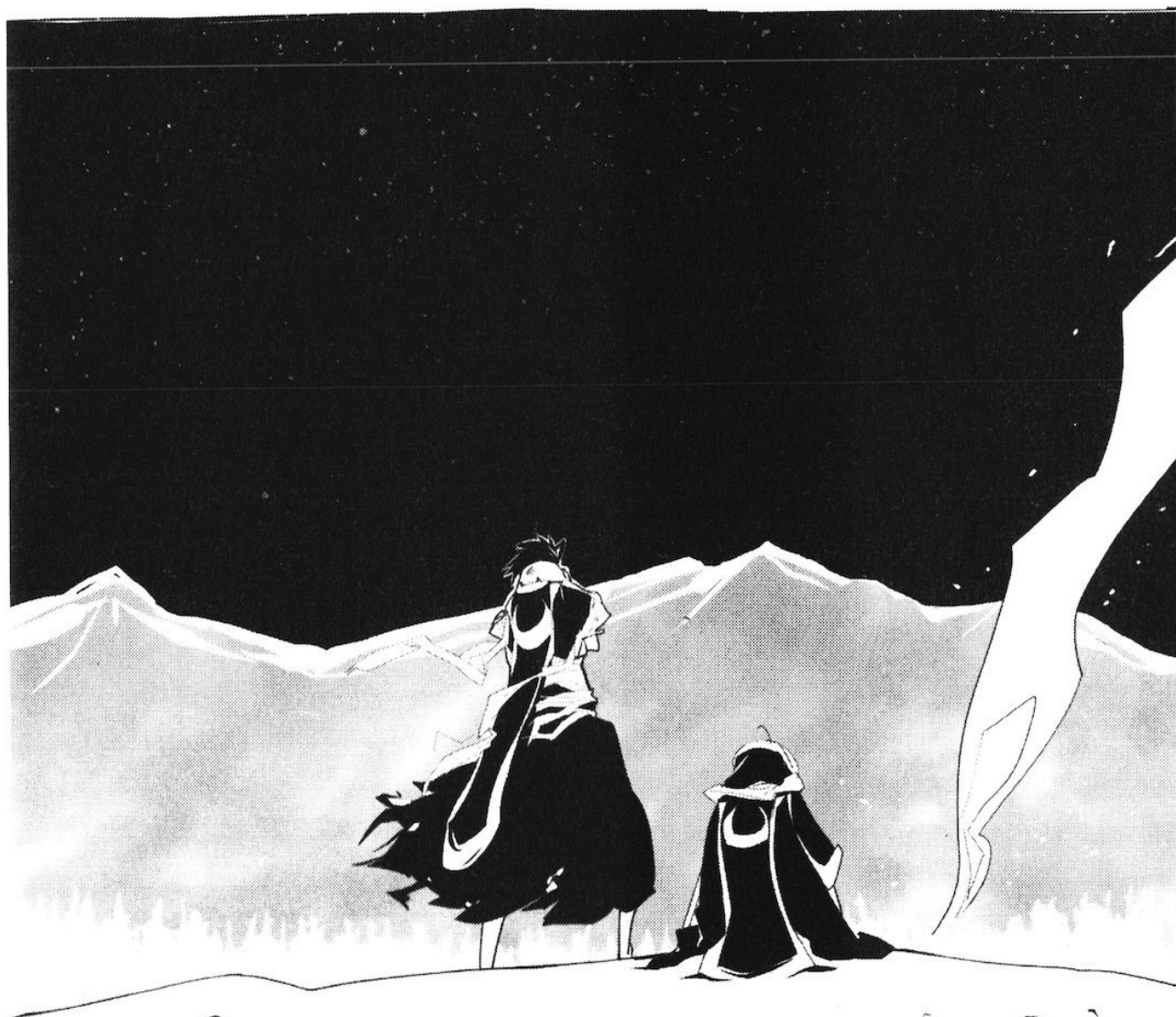
The footsteps approaching him from the hill's snow behind him belonged to Fuwa. Then she said more.

"Everyone's about to take action. Oushuu, Sviet Rus...as well as Musashi and us."

Chapter 45: Spectator of a Breathtaking View

第四十五章

『絶景の傍観者』



それは常には見えぬもの
己の心を写して反射する
気付きの場の去り際
配点（視線）

It is something you can never see

It is a reflection of your heart

When leaving a place of realization

Point Allocation (Gaze)

Narimasa saw Fuwa approaching him.

She was looking out at the hulk falling toward a frost-covered forest a few kilometers away.

“Huh? ...Shibata isn’t with you? I caught a glimpse of him from the other side.”

“Oh, he said that big thing crashing would send all the animals running from the forest, so he went out to hunt.”

“He always feeds the officers first, doesn’t he? ...Oh, but with Lady Oichi here, we might get more than just salted meat, so maybe this will be good.”

“Anyway, why are you here? You look like you’re about to trip with every step.”

“I’m not going to trip,” said Fuwa as she arrived at his side, crouched down, took a breath, and paused before saying more. “It was a rush, but we’ve got a connection. Matsu put in a lot of work, so make sure to thank Maeda.”

“You did what you could too, right? Don’t give Toshi and Matsu all the credit. It’s not like you have that much credit to call your own.”

“Ahh, you’re really good at thoughtlessly hurting people’s feelings, you know that?”

Fuwa lowered her crouching hips onto the snow and Narimasa frowned.

“Hey.”

“Oh, I’m fine, I’m fine. Unlike yesterday, I’m wearing waterproof tights.”

“Your ass’ll still get cold.”

“Girls’ tights are insulated. P.A. Oda does work in the desert too.”

“I see.”

Narimasa looked toward Sviet Rus and heard something move toward him in the snow at his feet.

“Sassa, are you worried about the people from Musashi?”

“Is anyone in P.A. Oda not?”

“I’m not.” Fuwa wrapped her arms around her knees. “I wonder what will happen once this invasion into Sviet Rus is over.”

“I wouldn’t know. Go ask Toshi or Hashiba.”

“You do too know.” Fuwa pointed her glasses to the north while still holding her knees. “The Testament descriptions say Akechi rebels against our master while we’re invading Sviet Rus. But Shibata’s forces can’t return to avenge our master and get taken out by Hashiba. And...”

Did you know this?

“One theory in the Testament descriptions says I die before that. From illness.”

“You got the lowest scores of any of the officers in this year’s athletic test, but you got ‘excellent’ on everything but vision on the health examination. There’s no way you’re dying of illness.”

“That would normally be something to worry about. Oh, but you were that curious about my scores?”

“No, Old Man Akechi was really envious of your blood pressure and everyone else with awful scores got jealous when they saw your data. That’s when I saw it.”

“...Was it that fun to look at it all?”

“Takigawa and Tanba got really depressed and started pinching at their stomach when they saw your waist measurement, but I guess some people probably enjoyed it.”

“So that’s why they started touching me a lot and asking me what I eat back at the start of spring. But I’ve never really worried about it too much.”

“That’s the worst part. You’re the indoor type, yet it doesn’t negatively impact you in the slightest. Takenaka asked Hashiba if they could clone your organs and donate them toward the advancement of medical science.”

“Hmm. I don’t really get it, but I am thankful my parents gave me such a good body,” said Fuwa. “But historically, I’m supposed to be sickly.”

“Yeah, supposed to be.”

“So if I do ‘die’, I think I’ll retire.”

“Ah? You won’t be coming with us? You could inherit another name or stick with us as a normal student.”

“Do you want me to?”

“Having you around is a huge help. It means I don’t have to manage my finances.”

“Hmm,” thought Fuwa when he responded so readily. She added a second “hmm” before responding. “If anything, you should probably use more of your money.”

“I don’t really care about fashion and I’m never at home.”

“No, not that. I mean use it on other people. Like your subordinates or the residents of your territory.”

“I thought I was...”

He scratched his head and Fuwa smiled bitterly.

“I more or less know you want to do that kind of thing and that’s why Maeda and I arrange for it, but you should use more money on publicly supporting your people instead of ‘watching over them from the shadows’.”

“That sounds like a pain, so you do it.”

“Nn...”

“You’re better at that kind of thing than me, right? So take care of it.”

He said it with a sigh and then he took a breath.

He looked to Honjou Shigenaga’s fleet leaving toward Sviet Rus.

“Well, either way, it’s almost time for war. This one should be pretty exciting in a number of ways, so I need to give it my all. Fuwa, you get ready too, okay?”

“Shaja. But that battle looked like something of a diversion, don’t you think?”

“A diversion?”

“Yeah.”

Fuwa nodded and opened an *insha kotob*. She looked west where a black form hung in the distant sky.

It was Novgorod.

Narimasa followed Fuwa's gaze and saw the floating city that had led them here.

But Fuwa suddenly moved her head to swing her gaze from Novgorod to up overhead.

He did the same and saw a ship arriving. It was the ship that had been flying along with Marfa. The hulk had fallen into the forest and could not turn back, but the other ship that had picked her and the others up was slowly turning back toward Novgorod while showing itself to them.

Fuwa spoke while listening to the sound of the wind overhead.

"A single diplomatic ship entered Novgorod while we were monitoring the mayoress's battle. And that ship arrived on a course from the M.H.R.R. Protestants. ...Sakuma was tracking it, but he had to keep his distance after a warning from Tomoe Gozen."

"What nation would be sending a diplomatic ship to Novgorod now?"

"Holland," said Fuwa calmly. "I'm sensing something strange going on behind the scenes. If this is the guest Marfa mentioned, then she must have known this would happen."

"Did she also predict Musashi would interfere with the three nations? I don't get this," honestly admitted Narimasa. "Musashi is rumored to be starting a special student general assembly and their Vice Chancellor was attacked, so they're effectively in a state of insurrection. And yet they keep intervening in the most pain-in-the-ass ways."

"You couldn't find the Vice Chancellor?"

That question came from an elevated location. Sign frames created an artificial sky inside the Ariake and that sky's sunset was coloring the bridge to the main entrance of Musashi Ariadust Academy.

Ookubo stood there with a red stole draped over her summer uniform and she was speaking into the sign frame next to her, but it was only text that answered her.

While looking at her own sign frame to the right, Kanou supplemented the words from the unspeaking responder.

“Milady, I have confirmed that the Vice Chancellor was seen returning to the Ariake from Mito. She then received treatment at the Asama Shrine’s medical facility, but we do not know where she went after that. After double checking, I have confirmed that the Vice Chancellor was seen returning to the Ariake from Mito. She then-...”

“Kanou-kun, you don’t have to get stuck in a loop.”

“My apologies.”

Kanou bowed and Ookubo nodded back before crossing her arms.

“This isn’t good. We messed up with the Secretary, but we have to do things right with the Vice Chancellor.”

“Judge. I have determined our reputation is on the line. I will instruct them to continue the search.”

“That’s right,” agreed Ookubo.

She faced forward.

From the bridge, she could see the entire Musashi contained in the dock’s internal land port. People and gods of war were working all over the ship and the long and wide blocks that had been empty recently were rapidly filling in.

“For now...”

She then spoke to no one in particular.

“Hey. Am I doing the wrong thing here?”

“I have determined you are not as long as you are capable of asking yourself that. Of course, that does not apply to those who only make a show of asking themselves and unquestioningly believe they are right in their heart.”

“True enough.” Ookubo smiled bitterly and shut her eyes. “But I still want to give voice to my concerns.”

Namely...

“What happened when the Musashi was on its way to England.”

Until recently, where she had been back then had been visible from here.

“The engine division... The gravitational acceleration wing on Murayama’s port side.”

When the ship had accelerated using gravitational cruising, the Representative Committee had been running around. To preserve the safety of the wide blocks, they had been placing atmospheric fixation spell charms on the houses and buildings and adjusting the valves for the ether pathways. Those jobs were technically under the jurisdiction of the Living Committee, but the Representative Committee was in charge of the wide blocks containing student dorms and the houses of alumni and parents.

Once the spell was atmospherically protecting a wide block, no one could get inside, so she had needed to travel along the outer walls. She had used the wide and long blocks of the exterior transport district to reach the neighboring line of wide blocks, but...

“Did you know?”

I can't keep that hint of excitement from my voice, thought Ookubo as she spoke to Kanou.

“When the outer hull opens up for gravitational cruising, a huge row of torii-style accelerator blocks comes into view. And when they glow, all the water surrounding the ship is swept away.”

Ookubo spread her arms a little.

“It’s all surrounded by mist in an instant. It’s a breathtaking view.”

“You love the Musashi, don’t you?”

Kanou’s words briefly froze Ookubo’s movements and expression.

...That’s right.

There was no point in hiding it and she was not even sure if there was enough there to hide, but she decided to be a little stubborn regardless.

“It’s not the Musashi I love. ...As much of a pain as it is, I just love all of those scenes where you can see the Far East’s history on the move. I especially love the ones I run into and realize that only I’ve noticed the turning point there.”

At that time, she had inappropriately realized that only she was gasping and viewing that breathtaking view. But...

“If it wasn’t for that shellfire, that is...”

Perhaps it had been punishment. No, the conflict with Tres España had been official and the shellfire that damaged the Musashi had been deemed part of that official conflict. But the Musashi had still been broken, and...

“There were a lot of injuries.”

Her position as a double inherited name holder had not helped in the slightest.

...It was entirely meaningless.

The officers and the transport ship sent out to counterattack had left the Musashi and they had lived apart for a while afterwards.

That may have been why she had thought something for what was likely the first time.

...There are some things not even an inherited name holder or anyone else can fight.

There was a type of power that forced helplessness onto people and rendered all resistance futile.

“It isn’t violence, political power, or public opinion. ... You can simply call it the history left behind which encompasses all of that.”

It swallowed up all else and set everything in motion.

It included the circumstances, the flow of time, the preparations, and the movement of the people.

There were times when it all complexly intertwined and left one unable to do anything but accept the violence, political power, and public opinion they should have been able to resist.

In that case, thought Ookubo. It isn’t the violence, the political power, or the public opinion that’s so frightening.

It was losing the chance to resist all that. That was difficult to sum up in a single word, but...

...Perhaps I should call it “destiny”.

Ookubo spoke her next thought aloud.

“I suppose that unopposable destiny accumulates to form what we call history.”

“Milady.”

“Yes?”

“Judge.” Kanou nodded and spoke calmly. “I define history as something people create and assisting people is the greatest task of an automaton. Saying that history is created by inevitable destiny and not people’s wills would affect my raison d’etre as an automaton.”

“Kanou-kun.”

Ookubo turned toward her and swung her left hand upwards.

The sheathed sword she had grabbed at some point whipped up the wind, flipping up Kanou’s skirt. Kanou quickly pushed the skirt back down with her left hand, but she still frowned.

“...Milady?”

Her tone was asking for the meaning of that and Ookubo reacted with a gentle movement.

She sighed.

“Well? Could you resist that?”

“No.”

Kanou was correct. She shook her head and corrected her posture.

“I could not resist it. I could only reduce the damage it caused as much as possible.”

“I’m the same. That was all I could do when that shell hit.”

Ookubo said something she had said to Kanou many times before.

“People can ‘cause’ things on their own, but they cannot know what will ‘happen’ to them ahead of time and they cannot act in advance to stop it from happening. And when what happens to them is caused by many factors and not just an individual’s will, the level of impossibility only rises.”

Hey.

“Is that why the world in motion is such a breathtaking view?”

Ookubo looked down at the expanse of colors before her. Kanou instantly stepped forward and flipped up Ookubo’s skirt.

“Eh?”

Ookubo was speechless, so Kanou nodded and spoke.

“I have determined that is a breathtaking view, milady.”

“...Kanou-kun.”

Kanou swiftly jumped back and Ookubo took a half step after her and whipped up the wind again. Kanou landed while holding her side skirt in place.

“Not bad, milady!”

Without replying, Ookubo tried to flip up Kanou’s skirt to make absolutely sure she won, but instead she had her own flipped up, putting her one point behind.

It was silly, but she could lose herself in it as long as she knew that. So she and Kanou used the full bridge to take positions against each other.

She spun around, rushed in, and pushed at the outer edge of her opponent’s knee so the knee would collapse.

“_____”

But when her opponent lowered her hips and moved back, she started to circle behind her to get the automaton to pursue her. She thought she had the perfect shot and whipped up the wind, but the automaton easily avoided it. But...

...*Honestly.*

That maid automaton was excellent at inventing ways to get her to take a break.

Ookubo was the politician type, but that was why moving her body made for a nice change of pace. As a result, she had learned martial arts and how to use a sword. Those abilities had come in handy when gaining her double inherited name.

But besides that, moving her body was fun and she upped her speed with nothing on her mind besides capturing Kanou.

But suddenly...

“Is this how it works!?”

Both Ookubo and Kanou had the sides and backs of their skirts flipped up at once.

It had happened without warning, but...

...Eh?

There was a reason for Ookubo's confusion. She and Kanou were facing each other. To flip up both their skirts, someone would have needed to instantly circle behind both her and Kanou. And do it fast enough that they did not notice.

She only knew one person here who could do that.

“Oriotorai-sensei!?”

Kanou was cautious of the swordswoman in a track suit.

Oriotorai was a teacher sent here by the Teachers League, so she was obligated to remain impartial in student affairs. Especially when it came to conflicts. But...

...She teaches Class 3-Plum which includes both the Student Council and the Chancellor's Officers.

Most teachers used the first year to teach the basics and the second year to begin with practice and applications of that, but Kanou had determined that Class 3-Plum's skill and knowledge of combat went beyond that of those who had already completed their third year.

...And I have determined that their political and debating skills have grown quite a bit thanks to the students like Honda Masazumi.

In other words, the teacher who had trained their enemy stood before them.

That was why Kanou stood between Oriotorai and Ookubo. Holding her hands together in front of her waist would be the standard pose, but she let them dangle at her sides this time.

She then gave a quick bow without taking her eyes off the woman and asked a question.

“Do you have business with Lady Ookubo, Oriotorai-sensei?”

“Sort of.” Oriotorai put a hand on her chin and faced Kanou. “About the special student general assembly. I gave it the stamp of approval and Principal Sakai gave his permission, so it's all ready to go. Last time, Principal Sakai said he'd ‘take care of it’, but this time it's going to be completely official.”

“Are you sure?”

“I don't mind at all as a teacher, but it is a pain as their homeroom teacher.”

“A pain?”

Oriotorai’s eyes and eyebrows bent in a smile and she beckoned her over.

Kanou looked back and made eye contact with Ookubo before facing Oriotorai again.

“...Do you need something?”

Oriotorai moved her face in close and pointed down.

Kanou was confused, but the woman’s expression changed to a glare.

“They haven’t been going to class at all lately, but they’re goofing off down below in the diplomatic ship’s pool. What am I supposed to do about this? Could I maybe fire a shell down at them? I really want to tell them to quit goofing off and start studying.”

“Judging from the situation, are you furious?”

“Maybe two steps away from it. I haven’t even been to the beach yet this year...”

“In the interest of self-preservation, I will nod and say that is truly unfortunate, but since it is currently afterschool, isn’t it up to the students to decide what to do?”

“So I can’t do it, huh?” sighed Oriotorai.

Then someone spoke from behind Kanou. It was Ookubo.

“You seem awfully calm, sensei. Do you trust our upperclassmen?”

“Eh? I certainly don’t trust them to behave in class or do their schoolwork, but I trust them in everything that matters. A poor student is made by a poor teacher. I’ve taught them, so of course I trust them. What about you? I know your homeroom teacher, Torii-sensei, just smiles and doesn’t get involved.”

Oriotorai smiled a little and Kanou recalled something. Ookubo’s father was a man of few words, but he had said something when he had heard about Ookubo’s decision to hold this special student general assembly.

...“*Create the future.*”

What had he meant? It was conceptually unclear. After all, the ability to create the future on their own contradicted the unavoidable destiny that Ookubo feared.

That may have been why Kanou asked a question without thinking.

“Oriotorai-sensei, do you think people can create the future? Or do you think human resistance is shattered by an unavoidable dest-. ...That sounds a lot like something the Secretary would say. I am very sorry. What I mean is-...”

“Hey, Kanou? Ookubo?”

Oriotorai straightened up again and gave them a small smile.

“I don’t really know about that. Humans are so small, after all. But there is one thing even I can tell you.”

“Which is?”

“Judge.” Oriotorai nodded. “Have you ever stood on the world stage to set the world in motion?”

Kanou sensed Ookubo tensing up behind her.

That may have been enough for Oriotorai.

“Good.” She put her hands on her hips. “Looks like you aren’t just trying to believe in some selfish little world you created in your imagination.”

She had one more thing to say.

“Then you’re probably going to be a lot of trouble for my kids.”

Study

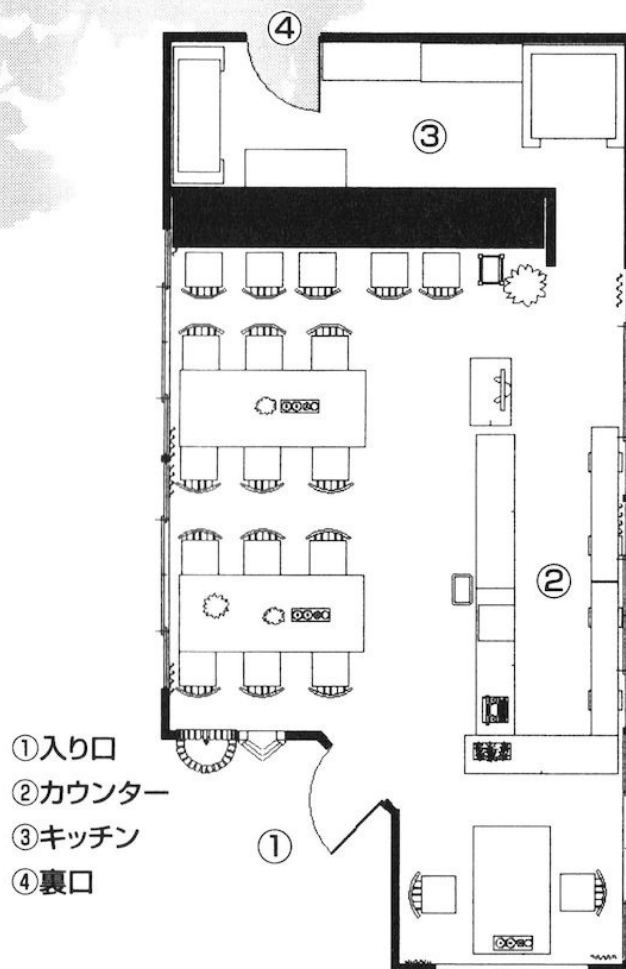
●青雷亭-BLUETHUNDER-●



「姉ちゃん! 姉ちゃん! 母ちゃんの働いてるBLUETHUNDERの構造教えてくんね!」



「フフフBL弟。ここんどこで毎日行ってるくせに店の中見てないとはスプーン落としまくりね? でもまあ上からの間取りは結構レアだし行っとくわ!」



「大体こんな感じね、右が艦首側、上が左舷側、そんな感じで見て頂戴。
内部は入り口右側がカウンター。奥がキッチンとなっているわ。下にある窓際の二人席はカップル席という感じがしら」



「結構フツーだなあ。でもこれ、カウンターが閉じてる方、万引きとかあったらどーすんだ?」



「閉鎖空間のような武蔵上で万引きしたところで、あまり良い結果にならないと思うわよ? とはいっても、パンも基本はカウンターの窓側の棚や、カウンター上に置いたバケットの上で売ってるから、そういう事態が発生しにくいけどね」



「つーか、うちの母ちゃん、リアルサムライだし、いろいろ仕込んでるから、そういうバカするのは来ねえか」



「フフ、アンタも結構うちのことを気に掛けてんのねえ」

Blue Thunder

Toori: Sis! Sis! Can you tell me the layout of the Blue Thunder where mom works!?

Kimi: Heh heh heh. BL brother, you've been visiting there every day recently, but you've been dropping too many spoons to actually look around, haven't you? Still, seeing it from above is pretty rare, so let's go for it!

1: Entrance

2: Counter

3: Kitchen

4: Back Entrance

Kimi: That's about it. You can think of the right as toward the bow and up as toward port. The counter is to the right of the entrance and the kitchen is in the back. That at the bottom is probably a two-person table for couples.

Toori: That's pretty normal. But with the counter closed like that, what happens if someone tries to shoplift?

Kimi: I doubt shoplifting in a closed space like the Musashi is going to end well. That said, the bread is generally sold from the window side of the counter or from a bucket on the counter, so it would be hard for it to happen in the first place.

Toori: And our mom's a real samurai. She'll have a ton of stuff set up, so I guess no one would be stupid enough to try it.

Kimi: Heh heh. You're pretty worried about the family, aren't you?

Chapter 46: Reunited One in a Heated Garden

第四十六章

『熱気庭の再会者』



真面目と真剣と
どう違うというのだろう
配点（想い）

What is the difference

Between being diligent and being serious?

Point Allocation (Feelings)

Suzu was in an unknown place.

...This feels strange.

The place was apparently known as Sendai Castle's guest residence block.

It was a sealed room with several frames called icons on the walls in place of windows.

The Musashi had underground residences too. She was used to these sealed places because her own home was underground, but this place lacked the smells of cooking using fish, soy sauce, and sake that filled the Musashi. The blankets smelled strongly of soap and felt stiff.

She doubted this was because the space was carved out of the mountain. The student residences likely allowed for the same lifestyle as on the Musashi.

The somehow distant aspect of it all was because they were guests.

...Then I guess it's fine.

They were being separated from the normal "lifestyle" because it was the proper way to treat them. In that case, she wanted to understand what she could while receiving that treatment.

"Right."

She perceived her surroundings. She knew the room's structure and the location of the bed. She of course knew where the door was too. The neighboring room was Urquiaga's and he had said he was preparing his heart by playing a game with an elder sister character that used the Oushuu dialect. She did not really understand, but she knew it was safest to ignore it. That left...

...The left end of the hallway has the bath, the bathroom, the vending machines, and...a garden?

The person who had showed her around had called it the main garden and said she was free to visit it as she wished. So...

“Right.”

She decided to go there.

She opened the door. She expected the air to be chilly, but it was actually a little warmer. The sounds reverberated through the passageway and told her it was rectangular in shape. The guard student standing next to the door faced her, so she bowed.

“Can I...go to the garden?”

“Testament. Go right ahead. There is a checkpoint if you try to enter a different district, so please be careful. Try to stay within the main garden.”

The guard was a girl. Suzu made a mental note of what she said, nodded, and then said she was going.

She heard a voice through the neighboring room’s door.

“What!? Tenzou! You mean you didn’t buy this week’s FamiMar Tsushin!? And you call yourself a family marriage Shinto gamer!? Now I won’t know which choices to make and I won’t be able to clear the elder sister character on the first try! ...What? The distribution to Sviet Rus is slow!? Two days late!? You mean Toori can’t get a copy either!? Kh, but I can’t bow my head to Ohiroshiki! ...Oh, to hell with it!!”

Will this really help Urquiaga prepare himself? wondered Suzu as she walked past his door. The guard student was preoccupied with the door and quickly bowed once he noticed her.”

“Are you visiting the main garden? Go right ahead.”

She nodded and continued walking. Had that guard known she was going to the main garden because it was just that incredible a place for guests? But...

...I guess you wouldn’t normally ask if someone’s on their way to the bathroom or the vending machines.

Horizon, Toori-kun, and Kimi-chan would probably ask. And that’s in order of how serious they would be.

But how was there a garden here when it was underground?

“...Eh?”

Suddenly, a premonition of something incredible filled her heart. It was still far off, but something had escaped the garden and reached her here. It felt like something thick that could not be contained inside and was forced out.

...It's so dense?

There was no door dividing the spaces. She simply felt a rectangle of heat. That was the entrance. What lay beyond there? She did not know but she wanted to find out, so she continued forward.

It did not feel like she was entering the garden.

“Nn...”

It felt like she was passing through a wave of heat that created a thick surface.

Suzu's breath was immediately taken away.

She stepped into the main garden and walked down the wooden slope to the earthen ground.

...It's so dense!

Several abnormally dense sensations reached her senses: heat, noise, smell, humidity, and air movement. They all arrived so thickly from the ground and seemed to weigh down on her shoulders.

“Wah.”

She took a step back onto the wooden slope and took a breath.

But even that breath was dense.

...It's like a bath with plenty of additives.

The Musashi was unheated bathwater just placed in the bath.

The surface was heated bathwater.

This place was bathwater full of additives.

There was a reason this place had a presence so much denser than the surface.

“It's sealed...near the ceiling...”

That was probably why. The Musashi had underground parks a few floors tall, but they were mostly used to let air circulate between the upper and lower floors and thus were well

ventilated. That was why they lacked this kind of presence.

...But this place...is incredible.

There was minimal air circulation. The flowers were packed densely together on the ground rather than in beds and there were also vegetables growing in a similarly dense arrangement. There were occasional trees, but the branches that reached the ceiling were cut away so they would not spread too far and they did not cut off the heat coming from the ceiling.

The soil was the perfect dampness and warm air reached up to above her knees.

An earthy scent mixed with the flowers and vegetables.

...It reminds me of our extracurricular lesson during the second year.

They had dug for potatoes. Oriotorai-sensei had chosen it because she had wanted to make some chips to eat with her sake. Everyone had desperately dug around with their shovels, but for some reason Hassan had dug up potato after potato without difficulty. According to him, “The god of curry allows one to easily gather the necessary ingredients”, so that god was apparently biased towards his own self-interest.

Suzu gradually grew accustomed to this and she felt like she knew why this place was the way it was.

There were people here. For example, there were some sleeping below the trees.

She could tell from their breathing that they had fallen asleep due to exhaustion.

...That’s right.

This was not Musashi. They did not have eight cities like the Musashi. Nor was it an open area like Oxford Academy in England.

This was Sendai Castle.

It was a base filled with combat, politics, and the technology needed to live in this frigid land.

When she cleared her ears and body, she could sense the vibrations of things leaving or arriving at Sendai Castle’s landing zone.

With that kind of tension a constant presence, they would have little time to rest. So...

...Maybe they need this dense and powerful place.

While the Musashi’s nature districts provided a sense of nature as one casually passed

through them, this place provided the exhausted people with a sense of nature that they could soak in rather than just feel. Suzu thought about what that meant.

“Yes...”

She placed her feet back on the resilient dirt and began to walk.

It was a large place. It was about the size of four wide blocks placed side by side. The ceiling was about half as high as on one of the Musashi's underground floors. The small stream stood out because the heat was thinner there.

Suzu decided to make a circuit of the garden and began clockwise along a path through the densely growing flowers.

Masazumi had told her get as much information on Sendai Castle and the Date clan as she could. But she had said something else too: “Don't force it or do anything dangerous.”

So Suzu wanted to check over everything in the areas she was allowed.

...I need to do my job.

After a while, the path crossed the small stream.

She turned to face the person tending to the vegetables to the side.

She knew them. She realized they had not been from Date, so perhaps they had transferred schools.

Curious, she called out to the person who had their back turned to tend to the crops.

“Um...Sarutobi...Sasuke-san?”

Sasuke shuddered.

He had infiltrated Sendai Castle the night before and had been planning to contact the Musashi group and find out what they knew. However...

...That was Musashi's bangs girl, wasn't it!?

He had known she had excellent senses due to her blindness, but...

...I'm disguised down to the skeleton here!

He was currently supposed to be a reserve force student from the mountains and he was using the Russian-style name of Monkeytobist Sasy. *That might be a little more English than Russian, but whatever.*

Regardless, he should look like a foreigner right now.

Some of his shoulder bones had been reduced to change his skeletal structure. The same for his jaw. The color of his hair and everything else had been changed too. While he was not the best disguiser in the Ten Braves, this technique had been enough to pass through many different lands.

For that reason, he assumed there would be no problem here either and chose to ignore the girl. Saizou was nearby, hiding herself in her wind form, but she spoke to him in a voice only a ninja could hear.

“What’s going on here?”

“Don’t ask me. I don’t remember getting marked anywhere.”

“Then are you getting old all of a sudden?”

“You’re the same age as me!!”

“Then have you just lost your touch? Sigh, I guess I’ll have to be the breadwinner from now on...”

“Let’s not get ahead of ourselves here!”

“Um.”

He heard a voice.

“Sasuke...-san.”

He ignored her, but...

“Are you looking after the vegetables...with Saizou-san?”

Saizou shuddered.

...I’m invisible right now!

She would occasionally give herself a visible form to investigate something, but during that

time, she claimed to be a Russian freshman from the mountains. She went by the Russian-style name of Kilika Kretoshizon. Sasuke said claiming to be a freshman was a little much, but he did not know what he was talking about.

At any rate, she was invisible at the moment. She was nothing more than wind.

She even drank matcha and chewed on deodorizing leaves every day to erase her scent.

For that reason, she assumed there would be no problem here and chose to ignore the girl. Sasuke was right in front of her in his mountain resident disguise and he spoke to her in a voice only a ninja could hear.

“Hey, what’s going on here?”

“Don’t ask me. I don’t remember having my wind-print taken.”

“Then are you getting old all of a sudden?”

“Y-you’re the same age as me!!”

“Then have you just lost your touch? Sigh, I guess I’ll have to be the breadwinner from now on...”

“Well, that’s actually fine with me. It’s easier.”

“Um.”

She heard a voice.

“Are you...working? Sasuke-san?”

“C’mon, tell her that’s what you’re doing!!”

“Don’t ask the impossible!!”

“...Are you? Saizou-san?”

“C’mon, tell her that’s what we’re doing!!”

“Don’t ask the impossible!!”

But Musashi’s bangs girl only tilted her head.

“You...look different, but...you’re the same...aren’t you? The swaying...is the same as when...you were at Musashi.”

Sasuke shuddered again.

...The swaying of our bodies!?

He understood how this girl had seen through to their identities.

The swaying of one's body came from more than just the balance created by the skeleton and distribution of muscle. It came from one's pulse, blood pressure, hydration level, and the footing they were used to in their everyday life.

One could not change their pulse so easily.

Their blood pressure was not something they could just change at will.

For a ninja, the hydration level would be stable because they drank water at set intervals. And...

...The swaying, huh?

People who lived on the surface always had solid ground beneath their feet. The ground provided an immense reactive force, so they only had to think of their own balance.

But Musashi was different. Their footing was constantly swaying and tilting a little. It could shift during acceleration and it could kick back at them when braking.

Three weeks after leaving the Musashi, that habit should have left them, but...

"We trained for that..."

Yes. Along with those who had infiltrated the Musashi, they had trained for combat aboard the Musashi. They had built some suspended footing and then...

...We trained while recalling the actual shaking of the Musashi.

If those movements were still noticeable, it may have been because this place was carved out of solid rock. Even the slightest swaying of his body would stand out more in this solid place.

Saizou's wind was the same. She had her ether pulse as a spirit and the moisture that maintained her body and she had made sure she would not sway in Musashi's winds, so...

...This is bad.

Sasuke was glad that bangs girl had come here. If she had stayed on the Musashi, she would

definitely have detected the others infiltrating the Musashi. In that case...

“We have a chance at victory.”

“From now on, we need to train ourselves to change our pulse and such for infiltration missions. I’m getting the feeling that an ether change charm isn’t going to cut it anymore.”

“It’s the middle of the Warring States period. We shouldn’t be surprised by any kind of skill we run across. And in that case...”

Sasuke stood up. He looked back with a smile and spoke to her while gesturing as if explaining the vegetable garden.

“It’s been a while, miss. Do you need something?”

Suzu was glad.

She was glad they had not forgotten her, she was glad they were smiling at her, and she was glad she was not in the way. And with that in mind, another thought came to her.

Sasuke and Saizou had different forms from before, but she did not mind since there were a lot of people like that on the Musashi. Nenji changed form from moment to moment, so when she had first perceived him, she had thought he was some kind of artifact that had placed life inside bathwater.

She breathed a sigh of relief.

“Sasuke-san...and Saizou-san... Are you...working?”

She was glad she had found someone she knew in this unfamiliar land. She had not spoken with them much on the Musashi, but she had noticed them help clean the inside of the ship and work as waiters, so...

“Are you...working again?”

Sasuke mentally held his head in his hands.

...Um, when she says “working”...?

“Well, miss, we are working in our own way.”

“Sabotage?”

...This girl's voice carries surprisingly well!!

“Hey! Hey!” shouted Saizou in their ninja-exclusive voice. “I think this might be the biggest crisis of our lives!”

“It must be nice being invisible!!”

But the girl clasped her hands.

“Do your...best.”

Could he really agree to that? Did she think this was some kind of sport? In fact, who had taught her the word sabotage? This seemed like their fault.

Mary smiled bitterly in the sofa and looked back toward the person who had sneezed quietly.

“Lady Horizon? Is someone talking about you? I believe that is a Far Eastern folk belief.”

They were inside the Sviet Rus diplomatic ship's reception room waiting to land and Mary saw Horizon hold her palm out toward her. It was a signal to wait.

Horizon then brought her hands to her ear sensors and twisted them.

“Phew. That suppressed it.”

“Ehh!? Horizon! Is that a new function!? That's so cool!”

“What are you talking about? Snot suppression is a standard automaton function. It is the default, Toori-sama.”

Mitotsudaira hung her head to hide her expression and waved her hands back and forth, but what did that mean? Mary spoke up while lending her shoulder to Tenzou who was slowly dozing off next to her.

“We will be landing soon, too. ...Perhaps some of the other diplomats are speaking about us.”

Saizou listened to the explanation given by Musashi's acting captain.

It mostly only supported the information they already had, but seeing the links with Mogami and Sviet Rus was helpful. And...

“...So the Ten Spears have shown up,” she said so only Sasuke could hear.

“Hashiba is solidifying her position in K.P.A. Italia, but her subordinates and the P.A. Oda group holding Edo and Satomi must be making a diversion in Kantou.”

They had also heard that Takigawa Ichimasu had arrived to monitor Houjou. The problem was that Niwa was commanding the forces in Kantou now that Hashiba had gone to K.P.A. Italia.

“Number 2 of the Six Heavenly Demon Army... This isn't good.”

“But there aren't many people who can boss Takigawa around...”

This meant there was no safe ground left for Musashi.

Of course, Saizou knew that was true of themselves as well and then Sasuke asked a question of Musashi's acting captain.

“Anyway, miss, let's make a deal. ...If you'll agree not to tell anyone that we're here, we'll do something for you. What will it be?”

“You...!” shouted Saizou.

“It's fine, Saizou. People like this always keep their promises. Fulfilling a girl's request isn't a bad deal if it will protect our activities here.”

“...You never say that kind of thing about me.”

“You keep your promises, but you keep them a little too much.”

“What does that even mean?”

“See? You forget all about it, which is what makes it so frightening.”

She did not know what he meant, but there must have been something in the past that she had not thought of as a promise but he had. She was a little disappointed she did not know what he meant, but...

“Was it something bad?”

“No.”

Well, as long as I didn't guide him to bad luck as a spirit, she decided. They could both cause each other trouble at times.

Then Musashi's acting captain opened her mouth.

"Th-then...can I ask something...of you?"

"Sure. What is it?"

Saizou and Sasuke listened to the girl's request.

"Protect...Toori-kun."

Sasuke realized he could not immediately reply.

That was partially because he did not understand what she meant by that, but it was also because he did not have a clear view of their own future.

According to the Testament descriptions, their Sanada Academy would split into an east and west faction for the decisive Battle of Sekigahara. Their faction, the Sanada Nobushige faction, would side with Hashiba on the west and face Matsudaira on the east as their enemy.

...But I don't really know what will happen.

Hashiba was growing into a powerful force and they liked to complete history recreations in advance or via interpretation.

The Sanada Ten Braves would simply be swept along by that power.

But even if he did not know about themselves, there was one thing he did know.

"Miss, why do you want us to protect that boy?"

"Because." The girl lowered her eyebrows a little. "Toori-kun is protecting everyone...but he isn't protecting himself."

So...

"I want a lot of people...to protect...him."

That's all the more reason, thought Sasuke. All the more reason I can't protect him. He's our future enemy and a ninja can't let an enemy escape if he knows how important they are.

But...

“I’ll take care of that request.”

The wind answered by his side. It was Saizou. She spoke to Musashi’s acting captain without showing herself.

“I just have to protect your Chancellor by any means within reach, correct?”

“Yes... Please do.”

“That’s how it will be,” said Saizou in her ninja voice. “So if the time to assassinate him comes, do it on your own.”

“Thanks.”

He replied to her and then faced Musashi’s acting captain again.

“Well, you heard her. And don’t worry about me either.”

He saw some slight tenseness leave the girl’s face and he asked a question on a whim.

“Is Musashi’s Chancellor that important to you?”

“Yeah.”

She answered immediately and Saizou spoke to him in a tone that made it clear she was swinging her arms around.

“Nice! How innocent!”

“This is why people call you old.”

“I just feel the winds of maturity blowing into me when I see someone a little younger than me!”

“Is that so?”

Sasuke sighed and the girl in front of him spoke.

“But I still...don’t know...about myself.”

“What don’t you know about yourself?”

“H-Horizon is...who he loves. Mitotsudaira-san is...his knight. K-Kimi-chan is...his sister.

Masazumi-san is...h-his politician. Asama-san is..."

After that last name, she tilted her head a little but continued on.

"Everyone's the best...to Toori-kun...in something."

"That's how he divides up his connections to people. I do that too."

In this age, everyone with a certain level of achievement had a group of people that had helped them accomplish that. It could be the Chancellor's Officers, the Student Council, or a committee, but...

...It all comes down to connections to individuals.

Love and family were nothing more than one of those connections.

In that division of relationships, anyone who had reached the highest level of trust would become "the best" of their division.

For example, romance could be part of the process toward obtaining a family and it was very important. But in terms of maintaining a nation, matters of succession were important. That was why leaders had concubines they would sleep with to confirm the trust between them and those that served them.

...What a troublesome age.

It looked like the goal and the means mattered more than anything else, but...

"That's why it's important to gain trust and become 'the best' in something."

People did not even treat others as people in this age. It was an age filled with betrayal, resignation, and giving up on not just others but on oneself.

But in this age, what if someone had the same goal as you and showed trust in some means you were capable of?

What if that person was more or less the leader of a nation and was setting history in motion?

Couldn't you live your life to its fullest and leave your mark on history?

If so...

"I can't believe this," Sasuke said to Saizou.

"What is it?"

“This made me think of the past. ...When we were wondering what to do now that we were Unneeded.”

“That isn’t like you. Don’t worry. After all, you aren’t ‘the best’ where you are now.”

“That’s true,” agreed Sasuke.

Was the girl in front of them thinking the same things they had in the past?

...No, she isn’t.

She had realized the people around her had their worries and that they were using those worries to build some large connections. So...

“Don’t rush things, miss.”

He had just one thing to say now.

“It sounds like your king has a lot of ‘bests’ supporting him. And remember this: it’s someone with a lot of ‘best’ people that can become a true king.”

“What about you?” asked Saizou.

“I’ve got someone behind me who’s the best at two or three different things.”

“That isn’t cooking, bathing, and sleeping, is it?”

“You don’t trust me very much, do you!?”

He took a breath and spoke to the girl again.

“Keep trying at whatever you can. You might find an unexpected ‘best’ of your own. And even if you don’t, those that aren’t the best can still gain and understand a lot.”

“Is that true...of you two?”

He heard a bitter smile behind him.

“You could say we’re still on our way.”

“That’s true.” Sasuke smiled but did not stop gesturing as if telling her about the vegetables. “Now, how about a bonus? Your request might be a little difficult, so I’ll give you one more thing for free.”

“What is it?”

“Testament.” Sasuke held up a large radish as he answered. “I’ll make sure you come across the Date clan’s main problem without actually directly coming into contact with it. ...We plan to visit Mogami and Sviet Rus too, so this is a parting gift.”

“A-are you sure?”

“We’ll make sure it works out for you. I’m not interested in making anyone else Unneeded. And if you cause some trouble here, that’s only a plus for us.”

So...

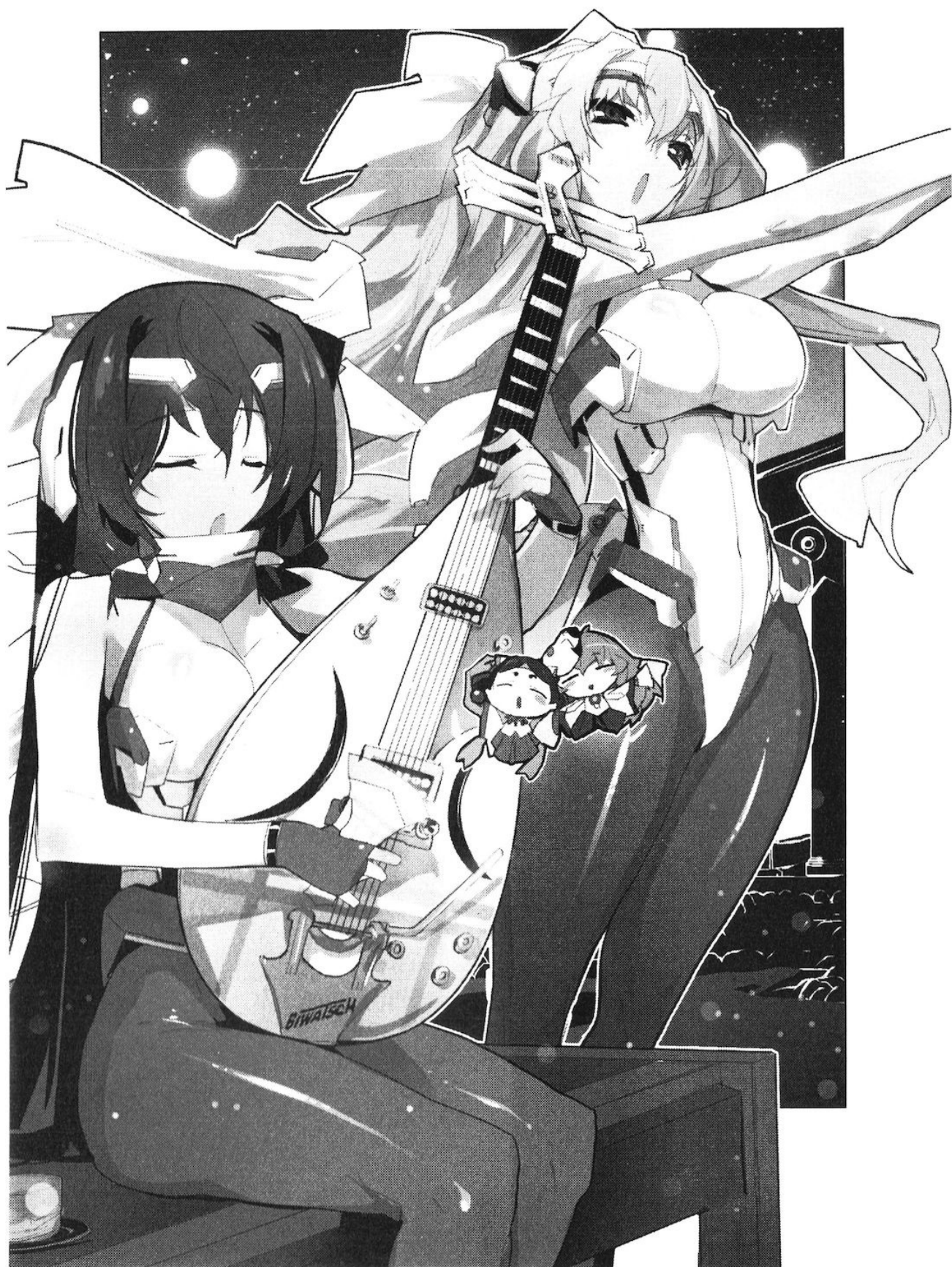
“Come here tonight...yes, at eleven.”

“At eleven?”

“Yes. I’ll keep Rusu from monitoring you so you can get here undetected. And then...”

He smiled.

“Yes, you should see something interesting. It’ll be the best thing you could find as a diplomat.”



A sound ceased to play.

It was the music of an instrument. It had filled the fresh breeze by the water's edge up in the night sky.

“Thank you very much for listening.”

Asama placed a light biwa next to her and relaxed her seated body. She looked up at Kimi who was catching her breath after dancing.

“I almost feel like I'm performing on my own without Mito here.”

“Heh heh. You're like a wandering biwa priest. But thanks to the recent renga boom, I hear if you go to the park at night, you can almost see the text box saying ‘4 Biwa Priests have appeared!’ as they surround you and force you to listen. Wait, why doesn't your shrine crack down on them? It seems my foolish brother is plotting something concerning that, though.”

“If anything, they're connected to the Buddhist temple, so it's their jurisdiction. As for Toorikun, there have been sightings of the biwa priests being chased around by someone with a biwa-shaped enema and shouting ‘biwenema’, so he's gone beyond the plotting stage. But anyway...”

Asama took a breath and Naito and Naruze asked a question.

“Can we request a song?”

“Of course. If you want to do karaoke, start singing and I'll match the chords.”

“You're pretty skilled,” commented Naomasa who was smiling and seemed a little tipsy.

A short distance away, someone else was working at a group of sign frames.

“Masazumi, did you actually eat dinner?”

“Eh? Yes. I didn't expect curry and a grill set to fall from the sky, though.”

She looked to some thick pieces of bamboo standing by the water's edge. The strengthened bamboo was thirty centimeters thick, their sections were all made into storage cases, and the tips were cut diagonally, but...

“Those are the bamboo spear supply drop rods used in Far Eastern battles. Musashi IZUMO has been researching how to keep them from shifting off course during the fall. This time, Hassan-kun's curry and Ohiroshiki-kun's outdoor cooking set were sent down as a test.”

“They use a marking system so they’ll reach their destination even through the stealth barrier, right?”

“Yes.”

To mark the spot, Naruze had drawn Ohiroshiki’s face six times. Each one had a bamboo spear stabbed right between the eyes.

“If they’re this accurate, couldn’t we use them as weapons?”

“No, this isn’t all that accurate. Based on the area of the pictures, the nose is the center, so why did they all hit between the eyes?”

“Hey, Asama! How about something metal like Iron Tentacle from the Hot Spring!? The intro can go ‘birorororo nyororei’ and then it can go ‘da da da ba ba nyoreri’.”

“Kimi, the title itself is contradictory. And if you give any weird lyrics to me or Mito, we’re leaving Kimitoasamade and making a new band without you.”

“Do you all always come up with songs like this?”

“Naruze, don’t you and Naito use Technohexen dreams to guide you to the chords for Eisen’s songs?”

As they exchanged words, Asama suddenly looked over at Masazumi out of curiosity.

...Oh, she looks like she doesn’t understand at all.

Asama felt a faint need to explain, but...

“...?”

She suddenly felt something odd at her feet.

...Huh?

“What is this feeling? It’s kind of familiar.”

But what she felt soon took form.

“Fog...”

At first, she felt the air growing cold, but they had all felt this fog before. The white fog and chill seemed to envelop them starting from the feet.

“This is the stealth of Oushuu’s hidden village,” said Naomasa.

It was old-style permeation stealth technology. Its barrier was weak, so it did not function as a defense barrier like the modern ones and it took a looser fog-like form. The fainter parts could be wasteful, but...

...It doesn’t take much power to maintain the barrier, so it’s quite efficient.

Meanwhile, a figure stepped down on the port side which was north.

It was a tall woman. She wore a Qing-Takeda uniform with a side skirt and she had long ears.

“The elder of Oushuu’s hidden village...”

She had welcomed them and sheltered the Musashi when they arrived in Kantou.

“Testament. ...I am Fujiwara Yasuhira, the final leader of Oushuu Fujiwara.”

She seemed like an adult even to Asama and the woman raised her right hand with her eyes bent in a smile.

Then she slowly spoke.

“You have your simultaneous meeting with the three nations and before that you have your special student general assembly, but how about we talk a bit about Oushuu before even that? ...As the sponsor who rescued Musashi, there is something I would like for you to understand.”

“Eh?”

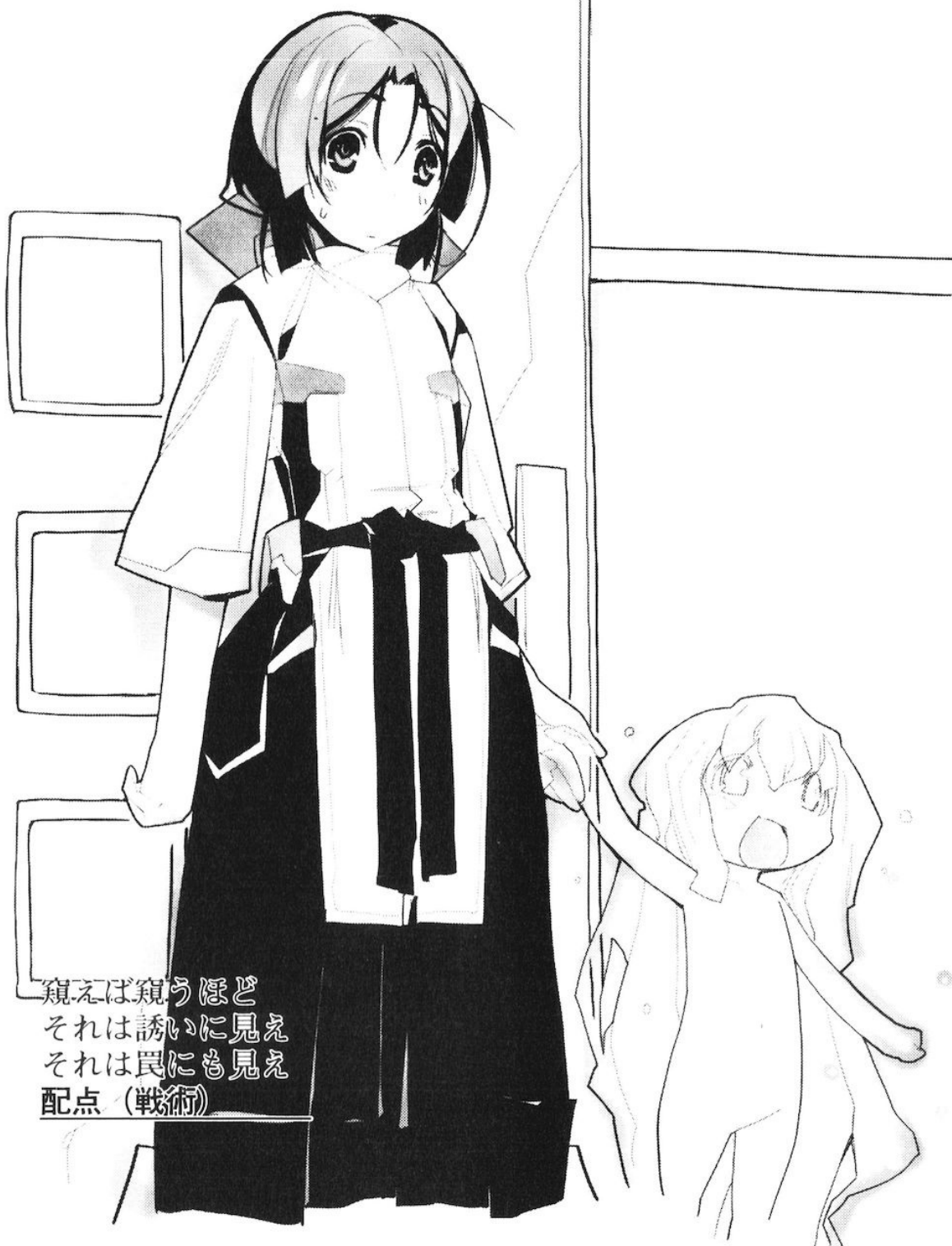
Asama panicked at Yasuhira’s words. She looked to the people leaning together for a perverted discussion and to the bamboo spears piercing the giant faces between the eyes.

“C-clean up! We need to clean things up mentally and physically! Don’t we!?”

Chapter 47: Gambler on the Ridge

第四十七章

『畔の勝負師』



窺えば窺うほど
それは誘いに見え
それは畏にも見え
配点 (戦術)

The more you examine it

The more it looks like bait

The more it looks like a trap

Point Allocation (Tactics)

It was a windowless room with an area of less than ten square meters. Bunk beds were attached to the wall and there was a desk for two, but people could currently only be found in the passageway down the center of the room.

A wheelchair nearly filled that passageway. It was almost entirely reclined and a girl lay on it with a blanket pulled up to her neck. She faced forward with a somewhat weak look.

“Sorry it suddenly got so bad tonight, Azuma. This month is a little worse than normal...”

“Yes, well, there’s no helping it, Miriam. Don’t worry about it and get some rest. I think this is to make up for how well you were doing during the day.”

Azuma stood in front of the room’s sliding door and he held a translucent girl’s hand.

“I heard tomorrow’s morning classes were switched to self-study. ...The library and cafeteria are running twenty-four hours a day for welfare purposes and for the people searching through documents on the remodeling, so the two of us will stop by the cafeteria and the library.”

“Are you okay, mama?”

Hearing that question, Miriam raised her head and smiled.

“I’m fine. I just feel like my insides are being twisted upwards, like my stomach is caving in, and like the blood vessels in my head are about to burst. Oh, and I’m getting constant waves of intense chills and nausea, so...ohhhh, there it is, there it is, there it is.”

“What did that mean, papa?”

“That mankind gained a great many ways to express ourselves with the invention of language. Oh, but...”

“Hm? What?”

“Well.” Azuma nodded. “The people on the diplomatic ship below told me there’s a way to avoid this suffering during your period.”

“Eh? What is it? A drug?”

“No. It’s apparently something the two of us can do together. Do you know what is?”

“Oh, so they’re taking this in that direction, are they?”

“Huh? Did I say something weird?”

“I’ll scold you plenty later. I don’t have it in me now, but consider yourself warned.”

“Hmm. I don’t really get it, but would it not work?”

“W-well, it’s not that it wouldn’t work...”

“What do you mean?”

“Hmm.” Miriam thought for a moment, but she soon lifted the blanket up to her forehead. “I can’t do this. I’m too weak now, so I’ll let it slide.”

“Then I guess it’ll have to wait until later.” Azuma spoke to her with a bitter smile. “You seem to know what they meant, so tell me if you feel like it.”

“Get out!!”

“Judge, judge.”

He pulled on the girl’s hand and started to leave, but...

“Azuma.”

“Eh? What? Should I buy you something? Red rice is the tradition, right?”

“You made that same joke last month and the month before that too. Anyway, um...”

“?”

Azuma tilted his head, but Miriam could not see with the blanket over her head. However...

“Did you want to visit the Mito village below? You had a chance today, didn’t you?”

“Well, I’m from Kinki, so I’d have trouble in Mito where they eat mostly natto and meat.”

“You need to bow down and apologize to the people of Mito...”

“Hm? I don’t really get it, but since VIPs have been banned from leaving or entering the Ariake, I might not have been able to come back if I’d gone. ...Still, it seems Honda-kun and the others are going to have a meeting down below even with things like that.”

“Hm? ...A meeting?”

“Yes. There was a notice over the divine transmission earlier that they’re having a meeting with some old Oushuu person.”

Azuma tilted his head as he explained.

“According to Honda-kun, this might turn into a history problem. Her father apparently said something about the history of Oushuu. ...It’s strange that this political issue might end up being about history. It sounds like something Neshinbara-kun would say.”

10ZO: “So once you clean up there, you’re having a meeting with the Oushuu representative?”

The diplomatic ship had landed at the Sviet Rus palace of Kasuga Gora Kremlin. Inside the visitors quarters at one end of the snowy fortress, Tenzou conversed over a sign frame while checking on the door.

...This means the three nation meeting has essentially become a four nation meeting.

10ZO: “Were you aiming for this, Masazumi-dono? Did you think holding the three nation meeting would lead the smaller forces to intervene lest they be crushed by the arrival of a new era?”

Vice President: “Judge. If the three nations gather together, the smaller forces would be forced to obey them. If they want to earn our gratitude by assisting Musashi ‘while we’re defenseless’, they have to act now. Then again, we’re separated from the Musashi on this diplomatic ship, so they could just as easily have chosen to visit Ookubo and the others in the Ariake. We need to give some thought to the fact that they chose us.”

Mal-Ga: “If you end up going to war with them after that, I’ll give you a standing ovation.”

Vice President: “Dammit. I swear I’ll settle this peacefully! Just you watch!”

10ZO: “I’m not sure what that’s about, but do you know who you’re dealing with here?”

Vice President: “Eh!? O-oh, yes. It’s Fujiwara Yasuhira... She’s the elder who has kept the

ruined Oushuu Fujiwara clan alive as a hidden village. That's who we're meeting with."

Silver Wolf: "I heard some rumors about her long ago in my Mito territory, but our arrival at the Ariake was my first time actually seeing her. She's probably going to be cautious about us. But...you know the, um, connection between Lady Yasuhira and Lady Yoshitsune, right?"

"Judge," Tenzou confirmed.

This palace doesn't have a great hall further in, he guessed from the structure of the ventilation and ceiling.

10ZO: "Judge. At the beginning of the Kamakura period, Lord Yoritomo held great political power and tried to destroy Oushuu Fujiwara for sheltering Lady Yoshitsune, his political enemy. Lady Yasuhira then tried to assassinate Lady Yoshitsune to gain Lord Yoritomo's forgiveness."

But Yoritomo had not forgiven them.

10ZO: "Lord Yoritomo destroyed Oushuu Fujiwara and Lady Yasuhira died...according to the Testament descriptions. Lady Yasuhira still being alive must be some form of interpretation, but based on what she's done, we can call her a great villain like Lord Matsunaga."

Vice President: "Thanks for filling in for Neshinbara there. Anyway, with all that in mind, I plan to do this without letting my guard down."

"But," cut in Naito.

Gold Mar: "Hiraizumi is a small power, right? How useful is it really to have a meeting with them here? Won't that draw the attention of Oushuu's three nations? Won't they think we're getting too friendly with Hiraizumi instead of them?"

Vice President: "We don't need to worry about that. ...Hiraizumi is a nation of pure-blooded long-lived. They're the oldest power in Oushuu. The three nations can't neglect Hiraizumi because it lies at the foundation of their history. Also..."

Masazumi paused for a breath and to choose her next words.

Vice President: "Hiraizumi is also the lead village of the long-lived scattered around the different nations. Having solid diplomatic relations with Hiraizumi will make it easier to speak with the long-lived powers of the other nations."

The long-lived powers can be hard to deal with, silently agreed Tenzou. Most of the long-lived were treated like nobility, but that was because the nations could not afford to treat them

poorly.

10ZO: “Gaining the help of a race that holds history in their hands would be most welcome.”

“I see,” replied Naito and Tenzou nodded as well.

10ZO: “I doubt it will be easy, but I’m sure Masazumi-dono can pull it off. She’s quite good at adlibbing...and I’m not talking about gags, just to be clear. Now, anyway, I can only guess what you were talking about before, but ending this by going to war would be par for the course, so feel free to do that if you must.”

Vice President: “You people are getting a little carried away since leaving the Musashi!!”

Gold Mar: “Judge. So how are things going for you, Tenzou? Where’s Ma-yan? In bed?”

Tenzou looked behind him.

They were inside the visitors quarters at one end of the Sviet Rus palace of Kasuga Gora Kremlin. Even the walls were covered in carpet and the bed was a twin size with a canopy.

The rooms were made so they had to sleep two to a bed.

And right now, a nude blonde lay on the bed, beckoning him over with a smile.

But this was not Mary. It was a crossdresser and a nudist. So...

10ZO: “Naito-dono, I am in the boy’s room.”

Mal-Ga: “What!? You’re pathetic!!!”

10ZO: “Th-that was sudden!!”

Mal-Ga: “You really are stupid! If you had a Ninja Room and a Chancellor Room and stuck Mitotsudaira in the latter, then those two doujins would buy me a new house! You understand, don’t you!? I’m talking about something that would have even Prince Shotoku flipping tearfully through the pages shouting ‘More! More! Ah, you could call this the seventeen articles of sex!’ And what have you given me instead? A Shudo Room!?”

10ZO: “I don’t want to deal with all that, so I’ll just respond to that last part: I never said this was a Shudo Room!!”

Mal-Ga: “Oh, sorry. Our club has some people who specialize in that and I already told them it was. Look forward to next month.”

10ZO: “N-now you’ve done it! You’ve really done it now, haven’t you!?”

Gold Mar: “But Tenzou, aren’t you disappointed Ma-yan’s not with you?”

Well, he thought while crossing his arms and pondering the situation.

...*Hmm*...

10ZO: “I always stay in the same room as Mary-dono, but since I’m always on the top bunk, I get nervous just thinking about being in the same bed as her. After all, she takes off all her clothes when she goes to bed. I can just imagine her hiding behind the curtain on the other side of the bed as she strips, but then noticing me, blushing, and saying ‘That’s embarrassing...’ And if she frantically pulled the blanket over her after stripping, that would be really cute. Then I would stand at the edge of the bed and ask ‘Can I get in?’ and she would nod while hiding half her face below the blanket. Once I got under the blanket too, it would go something like this: ‘Lady Mitotsudaira told me before that you’re given a child if you join together in bed.’ ‘Ehh? (← Me)’ ‘S-so, if we do this...’ And then we hold hands! Yes, Mary-dono knows nothing about docking methods! That’s important! So we end up falling asleep hand-in-hand, but since she has a habit of hugging in her sleep, she’ll grab at my arm. And then, ahh, if she pushes up my sleeve... Kh! Oh, god... Anyway, the next morning, Mary-dono would be a little sad and disappointed when she notices we aren’t still ‘joined together’ when she wakes up, so I can gently embrace her to comfort her. ‘That can wait until we get back to the Musashi. I like embracing you like this just as much.’ ‘Master Tenzou...!’ And then comes the kiss! Just like this! ...This is a chair! It tastes like varnish! ... Anyway, I think it would be something like that.”

Gold Mar: “Um, sorry, that was my fault. Yeah, sorry. I’m really sorry.”

Mal-Ga: “That’ll kill your sanity level, so I recommend just skimming through it, Margot. It’s downright toxic.”

10ZO: “H-how can you say that when you were the ones that asked me, you awful people!?”

A notification in the sign frame indicated someone had joined the divine chat.

Scarred: “Hm? ... You look like you’re having fun, but what is this about, Master Tenzou?”

Gold Mar: “Hmm, now what should we do with this chat log? ...What are Sviet Rus’s specialties?”

10ZO: “Kh! I’ll bring you back some Koshi-no-Ume jam and Snow Rice Cakes.”

Scarred: “Heh heh. So you’re discussing souvenirs? Anyway, um, Master Tenzou. ...Can we discuss the events of the day and our plans for tomorrow before going to sleep like we usually do?”

Asama: “I’ll be nice and set you up a chat limited to just the two of you.”

10ZO: “Thank you...wait, aren’t you supposed to be cleaning up!? Were you listening to all that!?”

Silver Wolf: “Speaking of which, 1st Special Duty Officer, I noticed you referenced me in that bizarre speech of yours, so we need to have a chat later.”

This isn’t looking good, he thought while pulling up a list of the photos he had taken of Mary at the festival. They were doing this over the divine chat this time, so what look was he supposed to have on his face while showing her these? Then again, they were in different rooms, so it all came down to his imagination which was fine in its own way. But...

10ZO: “Does this mean the Musashi group is prepared for their meeting?”

Masazumi answered Crossunite’s question while sitting on the bench they had prepared.

Vice President: “We’re prepared for the time being. You take care of things on your end too.”

It was night, but a large parasol and partition screens surrounded the space. They had brought them from the storage area below the terrace.

...This ship is meant for diplomatic meetings, so it makes sense they have this kind of equipment prepared.

She sipped on the tea Asama carried over and faced the person in the bench across from her.

That person was the elder of the Oushuu long-lived and the individual who had sheltered the Ariake.

...She’s another one of those wild people who lived through the Genpei War.

Masazumi swore in her heart she would not let her guard down. Ever since the Musashi had reached the Ariake, Musashi had not had any real interactions with them outside of carrying materials over for trade.

There was likely a reason for her arrival just before the three nations meeting and the special student general assembly.

With that in mind, Masazumi asked a question of Yasuhira.

“Now, should I view you as the representative of Shirakawa, the entrance of Oushuu? Lady

Fujiwara Yasuhira...what brings you here today?"

She listened to Yasuhira's reaction.

"_____"

It was a light breath.

It could have been interpreted as a laugh or a sigh of disappointment, but Masazumi did not let it get to her. Whatever the woman's initial impression was, she just had to improve upon that, so...

"I more or less know what it is you want to hear."

"Ho ho? And what is that?"

She's testing me, thought Masazumi as she answered.

"You want to know our vision of the future after the three nations meeting, but you also want us to reach a consensus on something, don't you?"

This was what the woman wanted.

"Are you here to ensure the stability and continued existence of Oushuu Fujiwara's Hiraizumi hidden village, Lady Yasuhira?"

"That is an excellent question. After all," said Yasuhira. "Musashi's claimed goal is world domination. And that will likely include our Hiraizumi hidden village. ...That is incompatible with us and that is why I wish to speak with you."

She moved on to what exactly she wished to speak about.

"What will you do with us? The Oushuu powers and the long-lived powers will be judging Musashi based on your answer. So think carefully. Will you or will you not compromise on your goal of world domination to allow for our continued existence?"

...She's pushing this pretty hard. I guess she knows she bears the future of both Oushuu and the long-lived.

With that thought, Masazumi looked to the long-lived woman sitting in front of her.

But Yasuhira did not react in any way.

She did not nod or shake her head and she showed no sign of discouragement or surprise.

That was why her next words came so suddenly.

“Now, as much as you like talking about your supposed world domination, that will be no easy task. Are you confident you can overcome tomorrow’s special student general assembly and make it through the three nations meeting?”

With no preparatory movement leading into the question, Masazumi had trouble controlling her own behavior, not to mention responding. It felt like being stabbed without warning by a passerby. But...

...So she’s the opposite of Yoshitsune.

Yoshitsune had seen too much of people and grown numb to it all, but she had maintained a powerful will and used that willfulness to move her nation. She had always placed herself out in the open.

Masazumi sensed that Yasuhira was the reverse.

As a long-lived, she had seen too much of people, but she had not grown numb. So unlike Yoshitsune, she hid her own will as she moved her nation. And she had a certain way of doing that.

...She ensures the continued existence of those hidden in Oushuu’s hidden village.

In that case, thought Masazumi as she leaned forward a little. If she isn’t going to show herself as she stabs me with her words, I’ll have to move forward myself.

Yasuhira saw the change in the Musashi Vice President’s behavior.

...Ho ho?

Her opponent had moved forward instead of pulling back. And while she was looking up at Yasuhira from below, she did so directly rather than with an upturned look. That position was to ensure she did not overlook any change in Yasuhira’s behavior.

...Now this is different.

The Musashi Vice President was telling Yasuhira she knew the woman was hiding herself.

She was taking an offensive stance.

Yasuhira knew this girl had faced Lady Yoshitsune, but had she gained something from that?

Or was this based entirely on her own instincts? The Musashi Vice President placed herself close by and gave her a testing look.

“_____”

Now this is interesting, thought Yasuhira. From the very start, she found this girl interesting. After all...

...It's almost like an act.

The girl was not naively thinking she would see through any reactions Yasuhira made. She was accepting Yasuhira's lack of reaction and seeing if the long-lived woman could keep it up to the end.

If Yasuhira did so, she would likely praise her.

If Yasuhira failed to do so, she would delight at having seen it.

On the one hand, Yasuhira was angered at being made into a spectacle, but on the other, she felt that her pride as a long-lived demanded that she kept this from affecting her.

This was interesting.

The girl understood her and was trying to toy with her pride.

By leaning forward in this meaningful way, she was bringing the fight to Yasuhira. So...

...That's right.

Now that they had confirmed each other's strategies and positions for this battle, she asked her question again.

“Do you have any chance of victory tomorrow?”

“We do,” replied Masazumi.

“But your Glasses Committee Head seems to think differently.”

She was fast.

She switched topics and plunged into her main point with incredible speed. Her argument

was bordering on leaps of logic.

She did not bother to lay out her groundwork. She used her information as a weapon and focused on that weapon's sharp edge in her negotiations. If her opponent faltered at that edge, they would be folded up inside and left behind by the rapidly-progressing argument.

But there was a way to hold that back.

Keep your own pace, thought Masazumi.

Her conversations with her father were the same. They would often exchange opinions on politics, but he would rebuke her if she tried to match his speed. He would tell her that was a sign that she did not know everything her opponent did, so she needed to calm down.

Trying to look clever was meaningless. It would only lead to mistakes.

So she looked to and observed her opponent's face. She searched for any kind of change in her behavior.

"You're saying Ookubo thinks differently than us?"

"No. I said she *seems* to. I was merely speculating."

Trick questions were not going to work. She was fast but accurate. *She's a pretty troublesome opponent*, thought Masazumi as she focused on preserving her own pace. She took a breath.

"Then let me say this: Ookubo does not think differently from us. She is our underclassman, she is a resident of Musashi, and she is thinking about the future of the Far East. We have the same ultimate goal, so I think we will both ultimately head in the same direction."

"Then let me ask you one thing. ...What is your ultimate goal?"

Damn she's fast, thought Masazumi again.

They had only discussed the following day and Ookubo, yet this woman had suddenly reached their ultimate goal. Arriving at the final topic after only exchanging a few words was unbelievably fast.

...Plus, this is dangerous.

That was how Masazumi judged Yasuhira's attack. After all, their ultimate goal was something they had already stated several times in several places.

...Retrieving the Logismoi Oplo and using them to stop the Apocalypse.

They had proclaimed this all along. There was no way someone in Yasuhira's position did not know about it.

But Yasuhira had still made a point of asking about their ultimate goal. In that case, she was not asking for their usual answer.

This woman's words would not be a mere drawn sword.

Panicking and answering as normal would definitely get Masazumi stabbed by that blade.

"I see."

Yasuhira had just the one negotiation method.

...She asks about anything related to her and those she represents before her opponent is ready.

If Masazumi was not prepared, Yasuhira could keep up the attack and gain a more advantageous position.

It was a method that only worked in a meeting with no advance warning like this.

There are some amazing people out there, thought Masazumi as she took another breath and spoke.

"Our ultimate goal is clear."

"And that is?"

"Judge." Masazumi nodded and said more. "As you already said, it is to conquer the world."

Yasuhira directly accepted her opponent's intent to conquer the world.

The Musashi Vice President was essentially saying they intended to conquer Oushuu's hidden village, so...

...She thought I would react in some way, didn't she?

She was trying to shake the woman to create an opening. She thought attacking there would act as a weak point to set the woman in motion.

But Yasuhira showed no change in behavior to Masazumi's words. She remained calm.

“Can you reveal your plan for that?”

Yasuhira waited for the Musashi Vice President’s next answer, but the girl shook her head.

“I cannot.”

“Why not?”

“Judge. We will follow the Testament descriptions by building up the Matsudaira clan’s rule in the Far East. That is based in the history recreation, so we can obtain the support of the other nations.”

The Musashi Vice President continued.

“But if the Testament Union nations claim Oushuu’s hidden village is in violation of the history recreation, protecting you will be nearly impossible. ...It is possible we will be forced to oppose you in the future, so why would we reveal our plan to you?”

“Is that a threat?”

Yasuhira’s question was made to stab at her opponent’s conscience.

A normal opponent would immediately deny it, but the Musashi Vice President paused for a moment and then slowly answered.

“I am merely stating the facts.”

She did not deny it. On top of that, she claimed her statements had been “facts”, which asked Yasuhira to agree with her.

She then said something more.

“I have no intention of going to war with Hiraizumi.”

“Oh? And why is that?”

“Because we have no reason to.”

The Musashi Vice President once more answered slowly.

“Listen,” she began. “I do not know why Hiraizumi remains a hidden village or why you are trying to maintain that form even as the world is attempting to reach peace. And I do not want to crush an opponent I do not understand, so tell me your reasons, Lady Yasuhira. ...Why is Hiraizumi still a hidden village? And why are you worried about our actions even as you try to keep your distance from the Far East like that? Please tell me.”

After a breath, the Musashi Vice President looked straight at Yasuhira and opened her mouth.

“You attempt to remain a hidden village even as the world approaches peace. ...Tell me why you are so intent on keeping your distance from the Far East, Lady Yasuhira.”

Masazumi thought about her bold approach here.

...Hiraizumi is undoubtedly keeping its distance from the Far Eastern powers.

Yasuhira was not simply maintaining their position as a hidden village. Masazumi felt the woman was maintaining that position in order to keep their distance from the Far East. After all...

...This is a land of resistance.

Her father had told her that and she had been taught it in history class.

A war had been fought in Oushuu during the Age of Dawn that predated the Testament.

It had begun as a territorial dispute between the Far Eastern powers and the world powers and Oushuu had become a region of intense fighting.

If that will of resistance remained, then this could be seen as a grudge against the Far Eastern powers. That history would have been passed down by the long-lived far more accurately than by the humans. And even if it did not in them, that spirit did still exist in Oushuu. That was why her father and others referred to it as a land of resistance.

Resistance.

Masazumi thought about that idea of opposing something. She felt it would be the keyword to dealing with Yasuhira and Hiraizumi.

Yasuhira was attempting to protect her hidden village. As for why...

“Has Oushuu still not forgiven the Far East?”

Masazumi did not know what exactly that past war had been, but that was why she had to say this.

“Could you rid yourself of your reservations by revealing all of that to us, Lady Yasuhira?”

“Wait.” Yasuhira remained calm. “You seem to be making a bit of a logical leap here. ...We simply wish for a promise that you will allow Hiraizumi to exist and that you will not invade

us.”

“That is a hopeless wish,” replied Masazumi as slowly as ever. “The current age will no longer allow it. ...It is true Hiraizumi has remained hidden without harming anyone as you engage in trade and act as a pipeline between Oushuu and Kantou. And the leaders of every nation will be hesitant to crush you after all this time for fear of the long-lived descendants scattered throughout every nation. But...”

Masazumi decided to repeat that term that idiot had used almost as if it was a secondary concern.

“We are after world domination, Lady Yasuhira. ...That’s something none of the past leaders aimed for. If we’re going to retrieve the Logismoi Oplo and stop the Apocalypse, we need to gain the other nations’ cooperation by defeating Hashiba and removing the threat of P.A. Oda. That is how Matsudaira will rule the world.”

She said more to push further.

“So conquering the world is how we will solve every problem we come across. That’s a foregone conclusion. Fujiwara Yasuhira, Elder of Hiraizumi, tell me what you have to say. Why are you keeping your distance from the Far East? In our vision of world domination, we will create a world that eliminates your reservations and allows you to live in the open without hiding.”

Asama felt a change in the atmosphere.

...*Eh?*

It came from Yasuhira. Her expression had not changed and she had not moved, but she was not saying anything.

Before, she had always replied without delay, but Masazumi’s declaration of world domination was proving different.

Asama: “I can’t believe that insane declaration was enough to get a change in behavior out of her.”

Vice President: “Just to be clear, it was Aoi that announced our plans of world domination, not me!”

Then there’s no helping it, thought Asama as the atmosphere around her and the others changed. Naito and Naruze were leaning their shoulders together, but they were making sure

they could both move at a moment's notice. As for Kimi...

“Uzy, retie that ribbon for me.”

She had brought out her Mouse so she could use spells. Naomasa was sitting in a nearby chair, but she had lowered her previously crossed leg.

...Sh-should I do something too?

I need to go over my checklist. Bow: check. Arrows: check. Okay, I can fire on a moment's notice.

...I guess I'm ready to go without really doing anything. Good, good. Yes.

Wise Sister: “Asama, are you ready as a spell-user, not as a gunner?”

Asama: “...Eh? Spell...? D-don't be silly. O-of course I'm ready. I have all my usual firing assistance spells ready to go. I can use a homing spell or a rapid-fire spell right away!”

Smoking Girl: “Aren't those more on the gunner side of things than the spell-user side?”

I suppose so, she thought while mentally hanging her head, but then she noticed something.

...Masazumi is leaning even further forward.

She was on the attack.

Now that her opponent's behavior had changed, Musashi's Vice President spoke up with attack in mind.

Vice President: “Asama, I have a request.”

Asama: “Eh? I-I don't think there's any real reason to shoot yet.”

Almost Everyone: “So you'd shoot if there was!?”

Vice President: “Um...anyway. Asama, can you check on something concerning Oushuu's older history for me?”

Asama could guess what this was about.

Asama: “You mean about Oushuu's ‘resistance’?”

That was something Masazumi's father had mentioned before. And...

Vice President: “I suppose Musashi’s Shinto representative *would* be able to surmise that much.”

Asama: “...Yes. But don’t hold back. There might be times when you have to hand something off to me, so please do if you need to.”

Vice President: “Yes, you are Musashi’s Shinto representative, after all. ...Depending on how this plays out, I might take you up on that offer.”

Masazumi nodded with her back to Asama and faced Yasuhira once more.

She spoke calmly.

“For the history recreation and as the solution to the problems we face, we will conquer the world. What will Hiraizumi do about that, Fujiwara Yasuhira?”

That question received a response. The hidden village’s elder said the following:
“Resistance will be our only option.”

So they really are going with resistance, thought Masazumi.

In that case, she added.

In the corner of her eye, she saw Asama beginning to search for information on her sign frame. She was prepared to speak as the Shinto representative, so Masazumi placed relief in her heart and faced Yasuhira again.

“Allow me to repeat myself.”

She held out her right hand so Yasuhira would not speak.

“I have no intention of going to war with Hiraizumi.”

Maruba-ya: “Why not? Isn’t that weird?”

Vice President: “Dammit! I swear to you I won’t go to war this time!!”

She felt she was growing more and more stubborn, but she was not letting her feelings influence her politics.

At the moment, there was something she had to do, something she had to check on, and something she had to say.

So she repeated something else yet again.

“Our goal is world domination. Keep that in mind as I ask this.”

Masazumi leaned even further forward as she asked.

“In the history recreation, Hiraizumi has already been subjugated. ...Why do you still wish to exist?”

“Not wanting to be destroyed is a desire common to all things, is it not?”

“Since when?”

“I cannot speak for anything before the creation of Hiraizumi.”

I thought as much, thought Masazumi.

...So she's sticking to "I".

Masazumi had realized something by connecting together a few things Yasuhira had said. She had realized what words would shake that woman.

The keys to drawing out Yasuhira's words were the continued existence of Hiraizumi and the resistance against those who would stand in the way of that. However, that was not *the actual answer*.

There was a more fundamental reason why she wished for that continued existence and why she continued that resistance.

“It comes down to Oushuu's history, doesn't it?”

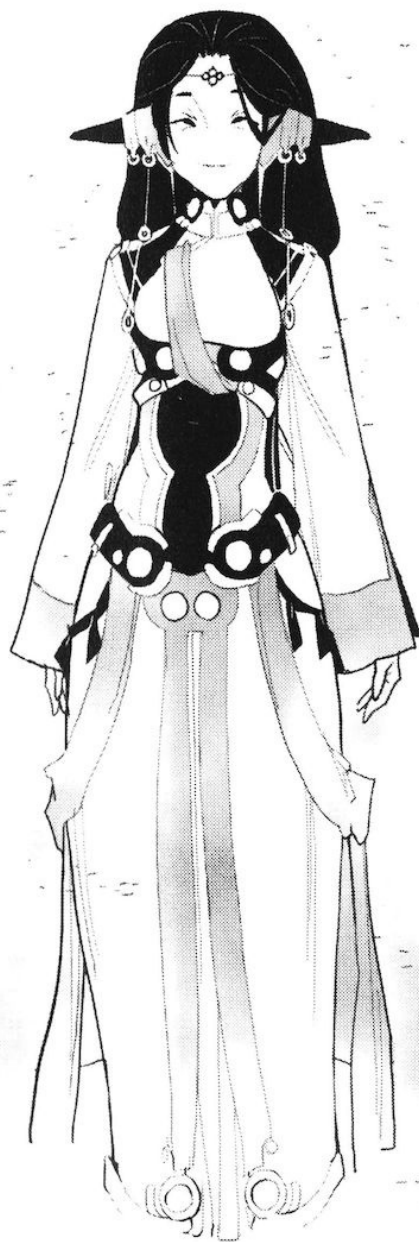
Masazumi's father had mentioned this and she had been taught about it in history class.

“What we need here is the history of resistance that created Oushuu's current spirit, right?”

Chapter 48: Victor of History

第四十八章

『歴史の勝者』



何不自由なくなど
そんなことは
ありませんでした
配点 (苦勞)

The idea that

We wanted for nothing

Was not true

Point Allocation (Hardship)

“During the Age of Dawn, Oushuu was the scene of intense fighting between the Far Eastern powers and the world nations. And that history of resistance is necessary to reach a consensus here and now, isn’t it?”

Yasuhira said nothing as Masazumi watched her.

But that silence was enough of an answer.

...I see.

Masazumi had presented world domination as a consensus of their goal and methods. Yasuhira had in turn presented their will of resistance, but...

...That resistance is the entrance to their consensus.

They had kept up that will of resistance by continuing to hide themselves. For that will to exist within a peaceful hidden village, it had to have been caused by something before that.

That would be something far in the past. After all, she had stressed that this was just what she had to say concerning the reason. And yet she was their leader, so no one else could make that decision for them.

So if there was anyone else, it would have to be a previous leader.

“Is Oushuu’s history – the history that created your will of resistance – the consensus you wish to present to us?”

Convinced Yasuhira was waiting for her to take the step forward, Masazumi forced her words forward with her lungs.

“In a previous age, an age before the Testament, the people descended from the heavens, but when they learned the environment was far too harsh in all land outside the Far East, a territorial war broke out in the Far East.”

Many different actions had been taken during that war, but...

“The final subjugation was carried out in Oushuu.”

That had been used as an early history recreation of the Imperial Court’s eastern campaign, so Oushuu had never undergone the subjugation by the Imperial Court and had not experienced the resistance against it that should have occurred. That had allowed the long-lived and other nonhumans there to gain great power.

...Of course, that power deteriorated during the Genpei War and many of their forces were lost...

That was why much was still unknown about Oushuu and why they were allowed to have hidden villages.

And...

“Fujiwara Yasuhira. ...As a long lived, you are a descendent of the force that showed their resistance during the Age of Dawn. To put it another way, you are a descendant of those who were crushed in a former age and yet survived. Those survivors created Hiraizumi so that they would not be crushed again, correct?”

So...

“Things are different now. In the current age, there is a threat of true world domination, so you came to ask us how likely we are to succeed. You were worried we might repeat the kind of ‘subjugation’ that shaped the current world during the Age of Dawn. ...Am I wrong?”

“Ho ho?”

Yasuhira’s expression changed. Her lips bent slightly. However...

“That is insufficient.”

Is this all they have? wondered Yasuhira.

...She has made it quite far.

As the Musashi Vice President had said, Oushuu had a long history. And it was the pure-blooded long-lived like her who had supported that history.

Not a single member of their race was ignorant of the Age of Dawn. That was several generations ago, but that was exactly why their ancestors told the stories and felt a duty to

protect that history.

After many twists and turns, the survivors of the Age of Dawn had eventually found themselves in the land of Hiraizumi.

The Testament descriptions had told her Hiraizumi would be crushed in her generation, so she had done everything she could to preserve its continued existence. But...

“That is insufficient.”

“But it isn’t wrong?”

“I am saying it is insufficient.” Yasuhira spoke slowly. “You are speaking from the viewpoint of history’s victors and that is insufficient to reach a common understanding with us. ...If you wish to set foot in the hidden village, you must move beyond the exterior.”

“What do we lack?”

“Well...”

Yasuhira recalled what her late grandfather had told her.

It was something her grandfather had heard from his grandfather and so on.

“Do you know why we have ensured Hiraizumi’s continued existence?”

Normally thinking, there was only one answer to that question.

...To maintain a nation of pure-blooded long-lived.

If the world’s academies were asked about Hiraizumi, their answer would likely be based on the significance of a nation. However, that was insufficient.

That was not what Hiraizumi was. That was not what their ancestors had wanted.

The Musashi Vice President nodded.

Her answer was coming. In that instant, Yasuhira decided that, if the girl did use a nation of pure-blooded long-lived as her answer, she would agree to cooperate with Musashi.

That would mean the Musashi Vice President *had an understanding* of Hiraizumi’s continued existence. Yasuhira had no problem with cooperating and maintaining the present state of affairs. And so she listened to what the Musashi Vice President had to say.

“Lady Yasuhira, you have a reason to wish for Hiraizumi’s continued existence, don’t you?”

And that reason was...

...To maintain a nation of pure-blooded long-lived.

Except that was not what the Musashi Vice President said.

“The territorial war during the Age of Dawn before the creation of the Testament was later used as an early recreation of Oushuu’s subjugation at the hands of the imperial army.”

And...

“There was a large gap in time between the two incidents. Oushuu’s subjugation by the imperial army happened in the year 787, after all. I do not know why that war during the Age of Dawn was used despite that distance in time, but I can guess what happened to Oushuu without the subjugation of that era.”

“_____”

It can’t be, thought Yasuhira.

Then Musashi’s Vice President said more.

“Oushuu must have greatly developed in peace. ...Until it fell to ruin in the turmoil of the Genpei War, that is.”

Masazumi did not rush herself as she clearly stated her thoughts.

“I do not know the history of Oushuu, but I do know that the Genpei War was a conflict between the humanoid and demonic long-lived of Oushuu and that it led to the currently small overall number of your kind. This next part is mere speculation, but I have another thought.”

Namely...

“Before the Genpei War, many nonhumans must have lived in peaceful Oushuu. That would naturally have created a large community. And...”

And...

“The pure-blooded long-lived who lived there would have been the leaders of that community.”

“Then...”

On Yasuhira's prompting, Masazumi nodded and responded.

"What Hiraizumi wants is not a long-lived nation. It is a large cooperative nation of all races, including nonhumans. ...In other words, the nation desired by the long-lived is not one for just the long-lived, right?"

"What makes you say something so grandiose?"

That was obvious. There was a precedent.

"Yoshitsune."

Masazumi only had to think of her.

"Yoshitsune accepted all peoples into her nation. Part of that had to do with her personality, but I now think that was also the desire of the pure-blooded long-lived as a whole. ... Because you continue to live, you wish to create an everlasting nation for those with nowhere else to go. The national character of the long-lived is to continue existing forever."

But if they lost, then that refuge, that ideal, and everything else would vanish.

That may be why, thought Masazumi.

But then Yasuhira suddenly spoke up.

"That is insufficient."

"_____"

Masazumi noticed the atmosphere change yet again.

...It's cold.

A chilly air arrived from Yasuhira and made her gasp a little.

The woman erased all her emotions and utterly eliminated all movement, so no warmth as a person reached Masazumi.

Masazumi saw Yasuhira's expression stiffen with a smile still on her lips. Then she gently uttered some words.

"That is indeed the meaning behind Hiraizumi. However..."

“But it isn’t wrong?”

“I am saying it is insufficient.”

Yes.

“It is insufficient. After all...”

Someone continued for her.

It was Asama. The shrine maiden’s dignified voice was quiet, but it seemed to purify the surrounding air.

“If recorded history is insufficient to speak of Oushuu, then there is only one other possibility.”

One thing was lacking.

“That would be the Age of Dawn.”

Masazumi looked back and Asama slowly nodded in her summer uniform.

That classmate had trained in Shinto and she had an upper level rank as a shrine maiden. And as Shinto used the Far Eastern gods, it was closely connected to the origin and history of the Far East.

Masazumi had learned of history in class and elsewhere, but a lot was unclear about the Age of Dawn that predated the Testament. That age was almost treated like Shinto mythology. So...

...I guess this would be Asama’s specialty.

She looked over and saw Asama smiling at her with ends of the eyebrows lowered. The look seemed to say everything would be all right, so Masazumi nodded.

...I’m counting on you.

Her thought must have gotten through because she heard a bitter laugh from the Aoi Sister next to Asama, but this was a nice break for her.

“Please give me some time to organize some data. If I do that, I can reach an understanding of Oushuu during the Age of Dawn and the territorial war that broke out there before the Testament had even been created.”

Asama faced Yasuhira head-on as if she could see through her.

“This will touch on a Shinto taboo, but I think I will be able to discuss it with you.”

...Now, I need to organize my feelings as well as the data.

Asama had said she would discuss this, but she was somewhat hesitant.

After all, the fate of Musashi was riding on this.

Hiraizumi had its roots in the hostile side of their history. Could they really reach the consensus they needed to cooperate? All of that could be lost depending on her answer here.

If Neshinbara-kun was here, I could leave it all to him, she thought.

...And...

She thought about Masazumi, as well as Toori and the others beyond the sign frame.

She was not an officer, but she was a classmate and she was a shrine maiden of the Asama Shrine that managed Musashi's Shinto.

Since ancient times, shrine maidens had been leaders who used divination to guide the people. In modern times, they used their exorcising arrows to smash through people's obstacles. *...No, I mustn't smash things. What are shrine maidens again? Um, tentacles are only in porn games, so that doesn't count. And that technically has nothing to do with shrine maidens anyway. Besides, tentacles attack everyone equally. Tentacles believe in equality. In that case, shrine maidens are...*

Asama: “Shrine maidens guide and help people, right?”

Mal-Ga: “Nope.”

Why didn't she have to think before answering!?

Wise Sister: “Heh heh. Naruze, that's what Asama thinks they are, so you mustn't take issue with the way other people view the world.”

Asama: “I'm not sure I like how you put it, but that's more or less it.”

Her archery, sniping, and bombardments were generally meant to help the people. Sometimes it might come down to relieving stress or shooting for shooting's sake, but it was generally to help people.

Helping people was a shrine maiden's job.

That was why there were times when they seemed bothered by her.

Asama: "It can be difficult to think about what would have happened if I couldn't help someone."

At the moment, she might be able to help Masazumi, Toori, and the others.

But...

"Yes."

She suddenly recalled something from the past. Long ago, the brother of a certain pair of siblings had gone away and she had been unable to do anything about it.

That was not a pleasant time, thought Asama.

It had happened ten years before.

She had only been able to wait and to comfort the sister who had been left behind. And when he had returned, she had been unable to do anything for him. She had hated that about herself and had ended up distancing herself from them because of it.

She had been unable to help back then.

She may only have remembered that due to the events of that morning. Just like ten years before, she had spent the night at their house and felt like he was not there in the morning.

Once again, he was not here. He was in Sviet Rus instead.

Just like ten years before, she had to wait.

...*But...*

Asama: "Kimi."

Wise Sister: "Heh heh. What is it? My foolish brother?"

It could be a problem how sharp that girl was. Asama released a bitter laugh and sigh, but in that case...

Asama: "Will my help make his return all the more meaningful? ...His return back then, I

mean.”

Kimi laughed quietly, likely because of the forced final clarification.

“Don’t worry.”

Kimi faced and spoke to her.

“Don’t worry, Asama! If you accidentally go ‘Oooooops! I just blasted you, so please☆for☆give☆me!’, I’ll forgive you! Now, go for it! Musashi will go for the future as well, so it’ll be okay! Oh, but don’t make an intentional accident just because you want to blast someone!!”

“I really don’t want to quibble over details, but please don’t call it ‘blasting’ people. And I think that just explosively ruined something inside me, so what am I supposed to do now?”

She said that while glaring at the girl, but she did have her thoughts on the issue.

...That’s right.

There was always someone nearby. Whether she succeeded or not, someone would be there. They would not make an effort to be with her, they would simply be there.

That was different from the past.

“_____”

She decided to give her answer, so she looked up toward Yasuhira. But then sudden words reached her from the side.

Me: “Hey, Asama.”

It was Toori. His unexpected call caused her pulse to race, but he did not hesitate to send more text her way.

Me: “I feel like you’ve been left with a difficult task here, but...Seijun, can you not answer this Shinkou person’s question?”

Vice President: “It’s pronounced Yasuhira, idiot. And Asama...if you’re worried, you can just give me your thoughts instead of answering directly. This is really my job.”

Asama: “Eh? Oh, n-no. I can do it myself...”

She hesitated, but she said it.

Asama: “This is something I want to say as the Shinto representative.”

“Is that so?” said Toori via text.

Me: “Asama, you have a tendency to take on a lot of burdens beyond your own, so if you ever mess something up or are worried about something, leave it all with me. And I’m not just talking about this right now.”

Asama’s heart began pounding at his sudden offer.

As a shrine maiden, helping people was her duty and yet he was offering her his help.

...Leave it all with him?

In the Musashi’s current state, worries were a constant companion, so could she really leave the past and so many other things with him?

That hesitation started to create a gap, so she quickly said more. However, it was a meaningless repeat question.

Asama: “Eh? Wh-what do you mean?”

Why do I keep saying the same things? she wondered.

However, he gave a proper answer to her awkward question.

Me: “You’re the one that gave me the power to do that with your contract. So doesn’t that mean you get top priority?”

Eh? thought Asama as she fell utterly speechless. She finally felt heat from her neck to her cheeks.

...Ohhh!

O-oh, he meant the spell! she said to convince herself.

...He wasn’t talking about my worries or my life! He was talking about spells!

Yes, that has to be it. Let’s leave it at that. You don’t need to think too much about this. Think too much and I’ll probably take on the kind of unnecessary burden he was talking about.

So...

“Honestly.”

She felt heat in her cheeks, but that was fine as long as it did not show. She decided not think about the reason for Kimi's bitter laugh and kept Yasuhira in the center of her vision.

There was one thing she had to say first.

"Okay. Now that I am prepared, I can answer you."

She made that advance statement in preparation for what she had to say.

"Let us discuss why the Oushuu forces still hold onto the events of the Age of Dawn."

In other words...

"Let us discuss the territorial war that occurred in the Far East."

Asama prepared herself to honestly state the truthful records she had.

"Listen," she began. "During the Age of Dawn's territorial war, the various powers were initially scattered, but later on, it unsurprisingly developed into a fight between the Far East and the world nations. After all, it was a struggle for the Far East's land. ...The Far East was outnumbered, so they were driven back to the Kinki region. But..."

But...

"The Far East created the being known as the Emperor, gained indirect access to the Environmental Gods, and used that power to bring themselves up to the same level as the world nations. Accessing the Environmental Gods meant they could alter the weather, you see. After that, the European forces agreed to a truce with the Far East. But another land put up such a perfect resistance that they had to be subjugated. ...Yes, that was the eastern nations from southern Kinki to Mikawa and from Kantou to Oushuu. It is now said that was used as a recreation of the Imperial Court's later subjugation of Oushuu."

Based on the records, that was the truth. However...

"Why?"

Asama knew what Yasuhira was asking.

"Why did they put up such a resistance that they had to be subjugated?"

Yes. If she thought about it, it was a natural question.

...It is indeed a mystery why Oushuu kept up their perfect resistance rather than giving in.

She had to answer that mystery.

Vice President: “Can you do this?”

“Yes,” replied Asama.

Her sign frame for divine transmission management settings showed her that the others were silently watching her words. *This is kind of embarrassing*, she thought.

...But if they're not nervous, I guess that's okay.

She calmed her heart and opened her mouth.

“From here on, what I say will include my own speculation.”

“Go ahead.”

She nodded at Yasuhira's prompting and spoke.

“The people fought a territorial war during the Age of Dawn, but when thinking about it in the current age, I think we are overlooking something. ...It is said the people were split between the different nations and they eventually settled onto two sides: the Far East and the world nations. But...”

Asama spoke as if dropping her thoughts straight forward.

“I think it must have been different. Rather than the Far East vs. the world nations...it must have been the Far East vs. the world nations and the Far Eastern powers that cooperated with them.”

After all...

“The Far Easterners had to have lived all across the Far East. ...As you said, Yasuhira-san, the historical subjugation of Oushuu was actually a subjugation of the community living in Oushuu. And if that was used for the history recreation...”

Naruze continued for her while standing protectively behind her.

“The battle line in Oushuu during the Age of Dawn was made up of, at the very least, a community of Far Eastern and world nation powers much like in the Oushuu we know from recorded history?”

Asama hesitated over that question, but...

“Yes. ...I think it must have been a calm and peaceful community.”

Of course, that would not have applied just to Oushuu. Something similar would have happened all over.

However...

“The Far Eastern powers would have seen it as subjugating the ‘traitors’ who had sided with the world nations. ...I think that was another side of the Age of Dawn’s territorial war.”

What she had just said was a taboo within Shinto, but...

...Everyone has made the same analysis.

She could have just claimed that “someone said so”, but lying came with a penalty for shrine maidens. Rather than lie and receive a penalty for sullyng her heart, she preferred to tell the truth and be penalized for that.

Asama: “To put it another way, I have nothing to fear right now.”

Me: “Hey, Asama.”

Asama: “Eh? Wh-what?”

He really likes being sudden, doesn’t he? she thought. However, she did feel like she was denying herself as a shrine maiden by touching on a taboo from an age of mythology. She had somewhat hoped that someone would say something here.

And as if in response to that hope, he started with an “uhh” of thought.

Me: “I said this before, but if this gets bad and you’ve gotta apologize to your dad, then say it’s my fault. I kind of convinced you to do this, right? So if that happens, I’ll have Tenzou buy a pack of Sviet Rus sweets and go apologize.”

10ZO: “Now that’s something I can’t just ignore! Oh, but regional alcoholic drinks can interfere with a Shinto official’s shrine registration, so maybe sweets would be the best bet.”

Vice President: “I don’t quite follow, but the responsibility for anything Asama says falls on me. If anything happens, tell them to contact the Student Council or the Provisional Council Building.”

You people... she thought as they kept saying things she could only respond to with a bitter smile. And...

Mal-Ga: “Fine then. I’ll make an offering of my latest doujinshi to pacify him.”

Uqui: “Yes. I had an elder sister shrine maiden game coming up next for testing, but maybe I should make a trade with Asama’s place...”

83: “Nothing is as persuasive as curry.”

These people... she thought while ignoring things that she could only respond to by hanging her head.

But this did remind Asama that she was not alone, so she breathed in, raised her head, and spoke to Yasuhira.

“History recreation interpretations were used to make most of the prehistoric subjugations into the Imperial Court’s eastern campaign. The Far East decided it should not fight its own people any further.”

So...

“Before the Imperial Court’s subjugation of the Far East, the Testament descriptions say there were non-Shinto native gods in the Far East. But due to the Imperial Court’s unification of the Far East, the gods of that new territory were taken into the ranks of Shinto’s earthly gods and helper gods. Any lands that resisted were subjugated, their gods were made into nameless ‘un-worshiped gods’ and their souls were laid to rest at the shrines.”

The records of Shinto, who were the victors, did not tell her how much of that had been done. The “facts” had blotted out the truth and both history and the world kept moving without any need for the truth.

But she did have a certain thought now.

“Yasuhira-san. Are you a descendant of the Far Easterners who became enemies of the Far East in the prehistoric Age of Dawn when the gods descended to this planet?”

And...

“From the viewpoint of a Shinto official like me, are you affiliated with the ‘un-worshiped gods’ who were wiped out by the gods we believe in?”

Masazumi listened to Asama’s words and let their contents flow into her heart.

“You are a people who did not join the Testament forces yet made use of them. ...Oushuu Fujiwara and those like you were a Far Eastern power that resisted the Far East and yet could not join the world nations.”

They could be seen as a people without a home.

Or perhaps they would better be described as a people with no clearly defined home.

It was true they were Far Easterners, but their blood had been mixed during the fighting and then...

...They were destroyed in the history recreation.

“From a Shinto perspective, they were purified by the interpretive destruction they received. But that left them with nothing. After all, they were not Shinto worshipers. They had a different faith. An un-worshiped faith.”

She would not say she understood. After all...

“You in Oushuu disobeyed and fought the Far East, but the world nations betrayed you and gave in to the Far East. The people of Oushuu did not want the Testament that they created. And you decided you could not return to your original relationship with the Far Eastern forces after you betrayed them. But...”

Emotion threatened to spill into Asama’s voice and tone, but she stopped there and took a breath.

“Even if you were traitors and even if that very fact was erased, you still thought of yourselves as Far Eastern and you could not overlook the difficulties your brief allies of the world nations were having in the Harmonic World. So...”

Masazumi knew where this was headed.

She turned to Asama, gave a nod of understanding, and then faced Yasuhira.

That woman simply waited for Asama’s words to seep into her.

“Whether you liked it or not, the Oushuu forces had no choice but to use Shinto and the Testament’s history recreation to develop the land. That is why, to this day, you have kept your distance from the Testament nations and Far Eastern powers while also making use of them.”

In other words...

“The foundation of Oushuu and Kantou comes not from selfishness but from selflessness. It comes from a trust strong enough to allow betrayal and from the resistance of a community. So even if the Age of Dawn has been forgotten, that has taken root and remains within you, like a spirit of mutual aid.”

This is tricky, thought Masazumi as she faced Yasuhira in front of her.

...They aren't simple losers and they aren't just a pitiable people.

They had betrayed their allies yet been betrayed themselves. And then that very past had been erased and they had been forced to survive using the power of their former enemy.

It felt exactly like Yasuhira's history recreation of betraying Yoshitsune yet receiving no reward from Yoritomo.

However, Musashi could not sympathize with them or treat them warmly.

Musashi stood on the winner's side and Musashi's people were short-lived. And more importantly, the reason Yasuhira and the others had yet to yield to the Testament was their pride in the fact that they had not made the wrong decision despite being destroyed for it.

I see, thought Masazumi. *She might become our ally and she might join our side, but there is a solid wall preventing us from facing her as a Far Easterner. Facing her without realizing that would be nothing more than approaching her as the ignorant victor.*

I need to be careful, she swore to herself.

Me: "Hey, can you ask Taikou something?"

Vice President: "It's Yasuhira, idiot. At least learn to read her name properly. And what do you want?"

Me: "Well, if all that's gotten through to Taikou, ask her something for me."

Ask her what? thought Masazumi as the idiot spoke via the sign frame.

Me: "Ask her what she thought of what Asama said."

"...Eh?"

Asama had been trying to calm her somewhat shaking heart after saying so very much.

As she had previously thought, what she had told Yasuhira was very nearly a taboo within Shinto.

These things were conveyed as facts and Shinto officials tended to assist in communications,

so anyone with that sort of job would hear these things at some point and guess at the truth hidden behind them.

They would realize that even Shinto had to keep its distance from certain people and that there was a reason for that distance.

Of course, that was from the Shinto point of view, but it was possible to research how it had actually happened and there were people who would tell you.

And this would bring a twinge of guilt to one's heart. After all, Shinto was meant to help people and to tune things with their purification techniques, yet this meant the spread of Shinto had been established by crushing a previous power.

How long had it been since she had felt that twinge of guilt? And how long had it been since her heart had shaken like this?

...I'm just too inexperienced.

She had first realized this fact after entering elementary school.

...That was when...

Some words stopped her heart from continuing. It was his voice coming from Kimi's vocalized sign frame. And it was just like that time in the past...

"Tell us what you thought of Asama's answer."

Asama's trembling thoughts came to a stop.

"Please," said the idiot. "Asama's always supporting us and she just made her place sound like villains to get some help out of you. Regardless of what happened in the past, Asama didn't actually do it and she helps us out a whole lot now. ...But she can take things too seriously, so she'll start feeling like she did do it. So while I feel bad asking you to do what's convenient for us, can't you do one little thing for-..."

"U-um, Toori-kun!"

Asama quickly faced Kimi's sign frame.

Kimi did not look at her. She simply half-closed her eyes and supported the sign frame with a fingertip. *They're always like this*, thought Asama about the two siblings in front of her.

"It's fine! You don't have to worry about my feelings! I mean, this is my role..."

“Of course I’m gonna worry about your feelings. I mean, I made a contract with you that gives you the power to leave that kind of thing with me. But...”

But...

“If you aren’t going to leave them with me, I’ll have to...um...I don’t really know how and a lot of the time I can’t do it...but I’ve just gotta purify them, right?”

“_____”

“Hey,” he said to Yasuhira. “I’m asking you because I don’t know what a good way of doing this is. ...Can you tell me whether what Asama said got through to you or not?”

“You mean...” Yasuhira tilted her head. “You want me to tell you whether I will cooperate with Musashi or not?”

“Lady Yasuhira.” This time Masazumi spoke up. “That idiot is talking about emotions. He is not asking if Asama’s answer was correct or not. So how about this?”

Masazumi held a prompting hand out to Yasuhira.

“We want you to tell us if Asama’s words moved you to emotion in any way.”

“Eh? N-no, I wasn’t really, um...”

What do I do? thought Asama. She was being treated like a crying child. She felt embarrassed and like a burden. But...

...They’re looking out for me.

Was it wrong of her to feel happy about that? Or was it simply honest? She did not know, but she saw Yasuhira raise her eyebrows a little in her direction.

And then the woman spoke.

“The fact that you are feeling discouraged by what you said means you feel you were wrong in what happened yet you do not actually believe you were wrong. ...That means you do not truly regret it.”

The feelings that had just filled Asama vanished. As did her words.

“_____”

Oh, no, she thought. My inexperience just tripped everyone up.

But before she could even take a breath, some more words reached her.

They came from Yasuhira. She continued as promptly as before and made her next comment.

“Even so...”

Even so...

“This confirms that Musashi, the Far East representative, is making an attempt to learn about the past and form a relationship with us using that knowledge. Even if you are not truly regretful, that is because the short-lived races can only understand the past through their imagination...and that makes you very forward-thinking and powerful.”

Also...

“Hearing that from a Shinto power has honestly lifted a burden from my shoulders.”

Yasuhira leaned forward to take a breath.

It almost looked like she was bowing.

She said nothing and they could not get any kind of promise out of her, but she did lean forward toward Asama.

“_____”

She calmly raised her head again and that simple action relieved Asama.

...Good.

The woman had said a burden had been lifted from her shoulders. Asama did not know how much that meant to a long-lived elder, but...

“Thank you very much.”

She naturally said that herself. There were negative aspects on both sides of their relationship, but they might be able to change something if they were both aware of it.

“Asama.”

His voice reached her.

“I can’t see what’s going on, but are things going well? Was that good? Was it?”

“Wh-what are you talking about? I was forced to thank her. Have Horizon scold you later.”

But, thought Asama. It is true he saved me there. So she also thought, I need to make sure the words and everything else I felt will continue to live on inside me.

As a shrine maiden, it was her job to help others, but...

...There are also people who are concerned for me and will help me.

She might not have realized this if she had not been in charge of his contract, so she faced the sign frame displaying his words and started to say “thank you”.

“_____”

But she stopped. She heard a quiet laugh from Kimi, but that was fine. They knew each other well enough that there was no need to thank each other.

So she faced Yasuhira instead and took yet another breath.

“Shinto supported the Far Eastern forces during the Age of Dawn’s territorial war and later supported the imperial army during the Age of the Testament. We have forgotten nothing.”

“Then...”

Asama accepted Yasuhira’s word with a nod.

“Yes. As long as I have my knowledge, Masazumi has her thoughts, Toori-kun and Horizon are leading us, and the rest of us are here too, Musashi can reach an understanding of your past. So will you tell us about the Age of Dawn and the Age of the Testament that followed? And can you tell us what Oushuu thought and did during those times?”

“That’s right,” added Masazumi as she leaned forward again. “How about it, Fujiwara Yasuhira? Can you tell us what we want to know? ...Can you tell us what kind of people the people of Oushuu are?”

Masazumi placed Yasuhira in the center of her vision.

She saw a calm expression and silent lips.

The woman said nothing, but Masazumi once more understood what the woman wanted.

...She is the descendant of an ideal nation that resisted those in power, so what will concern her most about the next candidate for that kind of power?

She had continually said they were “insufficient”.

...Was she judging whether she should reveal or hide their history of resisting those in power?

If they did not know, that would be the extent of their relationship.

But if they did know, she would reveal it all.

In that case, their fumbling exchange had finally prepared her to show herself to them. In other words...

“I wish to know what kind of resistance you will show us, the descendants of the victors, and I wish to know if you will be an inconvenient presence for us. Without knowing that, going for world domination would be a little dangerous.”

When she heard that, Yasuhira suddenly moved.

It was her gaze. Her eyes alone moved to show she was focused as she spoke.

“If you can crush us, I do think that would be fine too.”

“Unfortunately, those in power during the Age of Dawn also defeated your ancestors, but they did not crush them. That is why you are still here.”

“It would have been a lot easier for the Far East if they had.”

“No, it wouldn’t have. It wouldn’t have been easy finding replacements for you or Yoshitsune.”

“I can’t deny that Lady Yoshitsune is a part of this.”

Yasuhira adjusted her position in her seat.

She seemed to hesitate for a moment, but she soon opened her mouth again.

“In that case...let us discuss the deep past of Hiraizumi and Oushuu and use that to think about Musashi’s future actions.”

Yes.

“Let us bring back a story of the long distant past to establish the consensus and the foundation of Oushuu needed for our cooperation.”

Yasuhira had a thought.

...Is this what it means to be carefree?

That was what Yoshitsune had told her men to be at the beginning of the Battle of Nagashino.

And in Yasuhira's case...

...Do not throw out the past and do not throw out yourself. But...

"There are some things not worth holding onto."

People who would accept the past, step forward, and attempt to share it had arrived as candidates to lead the Far East. Even with a life as long as hers, an opportunity like this was unlikely to occur again. So...

"Let us speak."

Masazumi thought on what it meant to "speak".

...Does she want to establish an even deeper consensus with us?

Asama's shoulders lowered in relief next to her and Yasuhira must have noticed.

"_____"

She smiled a little. Or it seemed like it.

Masazumi did not ask if Yasuhira really wanted to do this. She had something else say instead.

"Please. This early summer night is perfect for telling old stories."

"Yes," agreed Yasuhira. "This is something that has not come in contact with the history of the victors. It is something most of the people of Oushuu have forgotten, but it lives on deep inside us in various places. ...This is a story of those who are now un-worshiped."

That was the entrance. It was the lead-in before moving back into the past.

"That was when this world gained its current rules. That was when the Age of the Testament began and the Anti-Decline Pro-Tuning was established. How much do you know about that?"

Chapter 49: Residents of the Dawn

第四十九章

『黎明の住人』



衰退の場

先見えぬ時代
ただ光を信じた人々
配点 (生存志望)

A place of decline

An age with an unknown future

A people who simply trusted in the light

Point Allocation (Desire to Survive)

Azuma was in the library on the first floor of Musashi Ariadust Academy's rear school building.

In the usual custom, he bowed to the large household shrine at the entrance before entering. Then the translucent girl holding his hand saw the librarian at the counter and tilted her head.

"It isn't the usual girl."

"That's right. Kimi-kun isn't working today."

The librarian girl leaned toward them over the counter.

"Do you want some candy?"

"Thank you."

The girl let go of Azuma's hand and started forward, but she looked back partway through.

"Can I?"

"You can."

The girl did not hesitate to nod and approach the counter. The librarian girl was the only one working here due to the Musashi's remodeling, but she pulled some candy and biscotti from below the counter.

"You're just like a father these days, Crown Prince."

Azuma was unsure how to respond, so he walked further in with a bitter smile. He was on his way to the history section. He had intended to check out some book or another and head back, but something had caught his attention.

...Oushuu.

They would be holding a meeting about that on the diplomatic ship below.

He had lived around the Kinki region, so Oushuu was an unknown to him. At the imperial palace, he had been told it was a conquered land where lawless people had been subjugated by the imperial army, but he knew perfectly well it was not that simple.

They had simply been unable to teach him that at the imperial palace due to their position there.

And of course, that policy existed across the entire Far East. After all, a stable life was only possible in the Far East because the Emperor was controlling the ley lines. It was only natural the story would spread from the viewpoint of the victorious imperial side. However...

“If I check through the documents myself, I’ll be able to see a lot more.”

...Of course, Neshinbara-kun has probably read all of the documents here.

Neshinbara was apparently badly injured at the moment. When Azuma had asked Adele about it, she had given him an incomprehensible answer: “Well, he’s been ironed-on as a pretty impressive mural. Oh, but not because he became a wall and protected something! He became a wall but was still defeated. Yes. And why am I thinking of self-deprecatingly saying he should have become the kind of wall I become!?” However, incomprehensible statements were hardly a new occurrence with that class, so he did not think it was an issue.

On his way to the section in the back, he saw a certain scene.

“...?”

He saw someone beyond the scattering of people visiting the library to check out books or documents.

...Isn’t that the second year’s Representative Council Head?

He was pretty sure her name was Ookubo. When he had returned in the spring, she had been listed in the data about new officers. She had a double inherited name which was rare for Musashi and she was apparently expected to be the next Vice President.

She stood in front of a shelf of Musashi’s public documents. She pulled out a few collections of documents, checked through them, and took notes on a sign frame when necessary.

...She’s diligent.

He was not saying she *looked* diligent. She *was* diligent. The atmosphere around her was

different. He felt bad comparing her to his class, though.

But as he watched her pull out some large documents with just her left arm, he realized she had trained her body well, which was unsurprising given the two swords she carried.

“_____”

Ookubo must have noticed his gaze because she looked back.

Her eyebrows rose when she noticed him and she quickly bowed.

“...!”

Since they were in the library, she said nothing as she bowed and Azuma quickly bowed back. *This isn't good*, he thought, but he could not quite put to words what exactly was not good as he hurried deeper into the library.

He arrived in the history section and prepared to grab what he wanted to look through, but...

“Huh? Sanyou-sensei?”

That was exactly who was there using a stepstool.

“The Far East Shoki: Origins? Um, is that the one where the scene starting with the annihilation was completely changed?”

“Eh? Oh, Azuma-kun? No, this one was changed for historical accuracy instead of to make everything more exciting. I just got to the scene where Izanagi and Izanami get married and then live happily together. Ow...ow, ow, ow, ow... Wh why does my heart ache? But I have a marriage interview next week... Ow, ow, ow.”

“S-Sanyou-sensei! In my defense, I didn't bring that up!”

Their voices were too loud, so the others searching for books glared at them. They bowed and then Azuma asked a new question.

“Why are you reading that?”

“Probably for the same reason you're here, Azuma-kun. Makiko told me they're having a meeting with the Oushuu representative down below.”

Sanyou smiled with her mouth spread horizontally.

“From a historical standpoint, it might be remarkable that a former imperial is investigating Oushuu's past.”

“Hmm... Is it really?”

It did not feel that way to him. Still, he was glad a teacher was investigating the same thing.

“Sanyou-sensei, do you know a lot about Oushuu’s history?”

“Enough to check on some things here.”

She smiled bitterly, but he did not know what she meant.

“Check on some things?”

“Judge. I was checking to see just how much knowledge there is here. After all, I need to know how much everyone already knows when I’m teaching them. For example...”

For example...

“How much they know about the Anti-Decline Pro-Tuning Project that divided the world between the real world and the Harmonic World and also created the Testament.”

“Anti-Decline Pro-Tuning? You mean that thing we learned about in history? Our four-eyes mentioned it too. I think it was the foundational movement that decided to have the Testament made and created a lot of the other problems we deal with today.”

Asama did not know what to say to Kimi’s comment and skeptical glare.

They were in the diplomatic ship’s courtyard. The partitions hiding them were still in place, but the topic under discussion had changed.

The Anti-Decline Pro-Tuning Project.

Technically, it was the Project to Advance the Tuning of the World to Fight Decline.

Long, long ago, that project had determined the current state of the world.

This was taught as mythology in elementary school, as knowledge in middle school, and as history in the first year of high school. It was also taught as a story in the Far Eastern language classes, but...

...It involves so much that the individual pieces tend to stand out more than the comprehensive “project”.

Many different things were linked together, so one had to explain some other things to explain

the establishment of any of them and that meant explaining it all at once. And once that was done, people tended to have forgotten what the original point of the explanation was. That was hardly surprising since it involved the entire world, but...

“Um, Kimi, to explain it simply...”

“Heh heh heh. Three words! Do it in three words!!”

“Sorry, not happening.”

“Khh!” The idiot sister leaned back with a smile. “That’s Asama for you! You gave up at Mach speed, but it was lovely! See!? You can do it if you try!!”

For some reason, Asama felt like she had badly lost there.

But one thing was for sure.

“The starting point of the current world was created by the Anti-Decline Pro-Tuning Project.”

Asama knew all about it. Anyone who worked at a shrine was taught this. The gods had fought in the heavens during the Age of the Gods, but that had come to an end, they had descended to this planet, and the current age of man had begun. At that time, a decision had been made about the world.

Just as she started to think about that, Yasuhira looked straight toward her.

...Eh?

Everyone noticed, but they realized she was not looking at them. Her eyes were focused on something behind them.

“The partitions...”

The partitions had been lined up to keep them as hidden as possible from outside view. The fronts were decorated with recently popular art, but that art depicted something.

“The Age of Dawn. Those events are told as myths today.”

The art told a story when viewed from one partition to the next.

It was an important topic, so it could be seen in textbooks and picture books too. The partition art was nothing more than symbols to remind one of the story, but...

“This story is even more popular in Oushuu and Kantou than it is in Mikawa and Kansai. You can see it just about anywhere.” Yasuhira slowly continued. “After all...it is based on past

events, but the events of that past Dawn still remain here due to the weaker influence of the Testament Union when compared to Kansai and the Kinki region.”

She looked to Asama.

“Now, I feel like hearing that story of the past for the first time in a while. ...Your level of understanding and speculation will determine how much I will tell you.”

“I see...”

Seeing how things were going, Naruze and Margot approached the partitions and rearranged them.

...The Age of Dawn, huh?

That was the time period after the people had descended from the heavens but before the Testament.

As a story, it was still commonly used in novels, manga, and games, but no one remained who had actually seen it.

However, the residents of Hiraizumi, the entrance to Oushuu, were generally long-lived.

“So you still pass down stories of what happened in that age and use it as your creed.”

“That is correct. ...That is at the base of Oushuu.”

She sure is confident, thought Naruze as she moved the partitions. After sharply narrowing her eyes, she asked something else.

“Date and Mogami have forgotten about your past, haven’t they? You might be acting like their great predecessors, but aren’t you just stalkers?”

“It does not matter that they have forgotten. The fact remains that Date, Mogami, and a portion of Sviet Rus and the Kantou forces have inherited this will and live by it.”

“This will?”

“The will of resistance.”

Naruze felt emotionlessness and calm in that immediate reply.

To express it in a picture, it felt like a wall had fallen in front of her to cut her off.

...Oh?

It must have been an absolute sense of conceit.

“Ga-chan.”

Margot called out to her while supporting the other side of the partition. Naruze looked over and saw the partition they were carrying was out of place in the lineup.

“Here, here. You’re going too far.”

“Judge. We need to move it back.”

She nodded and stepped back while looking over to Masazumi and Asama.

“Y’know,” she began. “Just to check again, why are we making such a fuss over Oushuu?”

“Um, Naruze? I’m pretty sure you know the answer already, but our position is not the same as Yasuhira-san’s.”

Asama said “listen” with a calmer expression than before. She had Hanami open a sign frame that displayed a list of dates and quickly moved it back to the prehistoric age.

The very last date listed was around 10,000 BCE, but...

“This era was handled in a compressed fashion for the history recreation. But that compressed portion is still part of the Testament history that our culture grew from. But that also means our society uses the history and interpretations of the victors listed in the Testament.”

But...

“Yasuhira-san is from a bloodline of those who resisted before the Testament’s creation. That means the creation of the Testament made her into one of those who defied those in power and lost.”

“So even after winning, we still have to worry about appearances and the past, huh?”

Naruze smiled bitterly and so did Asama. Then Asama added something else.

“Just to be clear...Shinto has nothing to be ashamed of.”

“Probably,” agreed Naruze.

She felt that was how the victor should be, so she did not hesitate to say something more.

“As a Technohexen, I think so too.”

She said that with a smile and Asama nodded again with a slight smile of her own.

...That expression is more like it.

While wondering what kind of scene to use that expression in, Naruze checked behind the partitions. The aft was obscured by thin fog. Once Margot finished her safety check on the other side, she smiled at Naruze and raised a hand.

“Judge,” replied Naruze while looking back to the front of the partitions. “We’re good to go. Can you take a look at these eight panels we’ve rearranged?”

Naruze and Naito had set the partitions up on the aft of the ship. They were lined up so Yasuhira and the others could see them all.

...I haven’t heard this story in a while.

There were eight partitions in all and their art told the story from left to right.

1: A meteor shower falling from the sky and the people looking up at it.

2: Rampaging dragons and great beasts in a giant forest and the people struggling against them.

3: The people fighting and destroying each other.

4: The people speaking and compromising with each other.

5: The people heading underground.

6: Another Divine States being created in an alternate dimension and the people looking at it.

7: The people parting ways and leaving.

8: The Testament always supporting them from heaven.

That’s the stereotypical story of the Dawn, thought Naruze. That story predated the history recreation of any myth and the Testament itself.

Naruze remembered her family telling it to her as an old story before she came to Musashi.

They had said Technohexen techniques had developed greatly in that age and had been passed down to the modern age while being molded by the different nations along the way.

...That was an age before the history recreation.

With that thought, Naruze looked to Asama.

A shrine maiden would have had a chance to learn a lot about the Age of Dawn and that girl turned to the meteor shower image on the first partition.

“First, the gods descended to this planet as people.”

Naruze heard the same story her parents had once told her.

Asama looked to the first partition’s art and explained it.

...A meteor shower falling from the sky and the people looking up at it.

“This is what happened in the Age of Dawn.”

She took a breath.

“When the gods descended to the earth, they had lost most of their power for some reason. At the time, it is said they could only use some spells and the relics from the Age of the Gods could only be used so many times either due to deterioration or damage.”

“Yes.” Yasuhira nodded. “But the people noticed a problem, didn’t they?”

“Yes. ...The people had originally left the planet because the planet’s environment had worsened. The Environmental Gods had been working to restore the environment, but – with the exception of their base here in the Far East – they had provided an excessive restoration to ensure the environment was never destroyed again.”

Asama nodded to Naruze who lit up the second partition with a spell.

The people were struggling against the dragons and great beasts rampaging inside a giant forest. However...

...They were no match for them.

The powerless people had yet to develop the techniques and spells needed to make up for their lost power, so they had been unable to fight back.

In modern terms, it would be like facing the rest of the world's nations with no combat ability.

...People do wonder how we could manage now, though.

At the time, everyone who had left the Divine States of the Far East had been entirely wiped out.

Sanyou borrowed a table in the back of the library and began a lecture for Azuma and the other interested students who approached.

The topic of her lecture was the Age of Dawn that predated the history recreation.

It was the Shinto priests who generally told this part of the past as a story, but...

"There is one job besides priest that allows you to tell this story: a teacher."

Sanyou said that with a smile and flipped through the picture book in her hands.

It was a children's picture book that told of the Age of Dawn, but the translucent girl in the seat on her left made a comment.

"That's scary."

Sanyou knew what she meant. The illustrations were simplified, but they still showed the people fighting against dragons and great beasts in giant forests or snowy lands, but eventually losing.

Sanyou could feel the bitterness entering her smile as she looked at those pictures.

...There's no helping it. You can still imagine what happens next even with the simplified illustration.

"Of course, this is just an imagined image of what happened based on legends that grew out of the stories of those who came back alive. The situation has changed with the modern advances in land development techniques. In fact, Tres España and Portugal have mostly finished their research in developing Harmonic Territories while England and Hexagone Française have...yes, they have built on repeated failures to send actual colonization expeditions through the Gate and to the New World."

But while things had improved, she had heard that the overall situation had yet to change.

The reason was simple.

“The harsh environment outside is greater than we imagine.”

She took a breath and simply stated the truth.

“The deserts are scorching, the snowy mountains are frigid, the forests are densely packed with trees over a hundred meters tall, the winds grow into great gales that blow everything away, and dragons and great beasts roam freely. ...To put it another way, everything is on a scale more appropriate for a world of the gods.”

She continued from there.

“And while the people have sent out countless colonization expeditions, they have all failed. That is partially because they could not send out any decent aerial ships, but even if they could head out into those harsh conditions, they could not create settlements or grow a population without the terraforming techniques of the Age of the Gods.”

Asama heard Yasuhira speak up in agreement.

“Yes. ...Even if they could go there, they had to live there. Even if they could live there, they had to give birth there. Even if they could give birth there, they had to raise the children there. And even if they could raise the children there, they had to pass on what they had and let the process repeat. ...And that cycle has to be stable and never once come to a stop. I have heard that they at best could reach the ‘give birth’ stage in the harsh environment of the Age of Dawn.”

“Heh heh. So they got far enough to do dirty things with each other...”

Asama: “W-wait! This is a meeting! A meeting! Please stay on topic!”

Me: “Eh? On topic!? Are you talking about dirty things right now!?”

Vice President: “We are not! Stay out of this! Why would you suddenly join in!?”

Me: “Y-y’know...I am the Student Council President... Eh? What is it, Horizon? You want me to go to you? You want me to clench my teeth for Asama’s share as well? It’ll only take an instant? What is it, a treat?”

<Me’s divine transmission has been cut off. There is a 75% possibility it was due to a solid impact. Do you approve?> Everyone silently hit the “approve” button.

Asama: “Oh, sorry about that. The line itself is open, so those who took part in the morning’s meeting can join in if they use the settings I sent them in a divine mail.”

I hope their presence will be a reassuring thing, thought Asama as she saw a few people join. She had Hanami send them the chat log and a compressed summary.

Hanami: “Hiraizumi’s Yasuhira-san has a grudge from the Age of Dawn, so she is being tsundere about whether to help us in the future. We have begun an explanation of the Age of Dawn even though Masazumi-san has not actually taken back her intent to go to war.”

Obscene: “Now that’s a nice summary!!”

Laborer: “Wait. What’s this about going to war?”

Marube-ya: “It explains everything so well!!”

Vice President: “Okay, I’m sorry! Yes, I’m sorry!”

Uqui: “That Age of Dawn annihilation scenario is always such a downer. In a porn game, it would be like reaching a happy ending where your child is born, but once the credits end, it comes up with a message saying, ‘Afterwards, every resident of their ***** Village died in agony because they were all military commanders.’ Talk about traumatic. It’s a good business decision if you want to sell Black Disks of an add-on scenario, though.”

Gold Mar: “Yeah, military commanders are pretty amazing.”

Uqui: “By the way, that was a spoiler for the ending of the Three Kingdom’s game ‘Shall We Do the Later Han?’ I didn’t have Tenzou’s help, so I only just managed to finish it.”

Sorry, but I’m still testing the add-on to that one. I guess that really is where the story’s going.

“Um...”

Asama cleared her throat and faced Yasuhira.

“Can we continue?”

“Go ahead.”

Was Asama just imagining the angry look on the woman’s face? At any rate...

“Anyway, the people were trapped in the Far East, but there was a problem. When sending out the colonization expeditions, they analyzed their bloodlines and determined which lands their ancestors came from...but once they were unable to leave the Far East, the population grew overcrowded and the nations split up into different factions to begin a territorial war.”

This was the third partition.

...The people fight and destroy each other.

Everyone had heard the result.

“Use of the spells of the time and a few other technologies led to the population being cut in half in two weeks. Also, most of their technology was lost during the war and all of the large-scale spells were lost...so even life in the Far East grew to be quite difficult in that age.”

“The people realized they couldn’t let things continue like that, so they gathered together and discussed what to do. Azuma-kun, do you know what those discussions led to?”

The back of the library had a “Meeting in Progress” label up and Azuma listened to Sanyou’s lecture at the study table they were using.

The story was the same one he had been taught in the imperial palace when returning to the world outside. Now that he thought about it, he realized that lecture had been done by a teacher sent by the Teacher’s League.

“Those Age of Dawn discussions are said to have been the beginning of what became known as the Testament Union.”

“Judge. That’s right. I suppose you would know.”

Sanyou smiled and nodded, but her smile was spread a bit horizontally.

She released a quiet breath before continuing.

“Of course, we don’t actually know if that’s what really happened.”

“Eh?”

“I mean, no one from back then is still alive. Of course, the odds are good that was what happened and there’s no problem if it was...but when it comes to history, be on the lookout for this kind of ‘story’. Even if it’s hard to tell fantasy from history, that age is already the age of those who came before us.”

She looked across the students surrounding her.

“But a few things were decided during those discussions.

“1: They would gain the power needed to protect and preserve mankind so it would never be destroyed.

“...That was their overall motto and it referred to the Testament Union and their equipment such as the Testament.

“2: They would speak with the Environmental Gods to stop the intensification of the world.

“...This was done with many sacrifices by sending the Party of Seven Hundred to the Environmental Gods deep underground.

“3: They would create an alternate dimension copy of the Far East known as the Harmonic Divine States to deal with the growing population and to help overcome the harsh environment of the outer world.

“...With the help of the Environmental Gods from #2, they created the Harmonic Divine States by linking different parts of the world and their ley lines to the alternate dimension... that is, the storage space they created using the ley lines. The Harmonic Divine States had the same form as the Far East, but it recreated the environment of the corresponding lands as per the Divine States-World Interaction. Everyone but the Far Easterners moved to the alternate dimension Harmonic Divine States and built up the technology they would need to overcome the harsh environment of the land they would one day develop and live in.

“4:...”

Azuma knew this one.

Sanyou must have known he would because she nodded his way.

He straightened his back and answered.

“4: The people knew they would be destroyed in war, so they wanted a common instruction manual that allowed them all to safely develop their nations without being destroyed. In other words...the Testament.”

“That’s right.” Sanyou smiled. “The people had once ascended to the heavens as gods. By repeating that history, they could safely develop their nations without being destroyed. ...The wars of history could be overcome through discussions and interpretations. The people had waged war in the heavens, waged war on the earth, and approached destruction countless times, so they may have been tired of it all. That is why they created the Testament to set a standard development pace for the Harmonic Divine States and that became every nation’s basic rules for peace and development.”

What were these four decisions known as?

“Anti-Decline Pro-Tuning.”

The meaning was clear.

“Looking at #1 through #4 together, their greatest goal seems to have been strengthening destiny to obtain a destiny that did not lead to destruction. If mankind’s destiny fell into chaos and approached destruction, they only had to retune it according to the good old historical sheet music known as the Testament. That is what we call the process by which we follow that music and that process continues to this day. That is why we are known as ‘musicians’ and why we recreate history around those with inherited names.”

“Now, then,” began Yasuhira. “The Anti-Decline Pro-Tuning Project began, the world nations began living in the Harmonic World, and they began recreating the histories of their lands. But the Far East remained in the real world and they needed the technology to support the Harmonic World. That required advancing their history recreation and obtaining those technologies through interpretations. Even if they had a reason, it was a forceful move forward and there was one main reason they could do so.”

Asama replied while Kimi mimed rapidly tapping a button next to her.

“That would be the Emperor’s presence.”

Asama fixed her collar and answered while ignoring Kimi’s double thumbs up.

“The Far East had already created a specialized organization for the Anti-Decline Pro-Tuning Project and it is said they had the divine and un-aging Emperor who could communicate with the Environmental Gods. So the Far East’s imperial forces were given an abridged Testament that began with the Nara period. They began the history recreation from the Nara period as that allowed them to obtain the various technologies they needed, and they had to wait for the other nations to catch up with their recreations.”

The Emperor was said to be deep in a fortress known as the imperial palace that was located in the center of Kyou. The un-aging Emperor was a living god whose role was to control the ley lines through the Environmental Gods and who led the Far East’s shrines.

The Emperor’s presence was a major reason the other nations were cautious of the Far East and hesitant to establish a permanent rule over them. Shinto workers did a lot of work related to the Far East’s divine transmission and transportation infrastructure and tended to act as contacts with the other nations, so they were taught about the history of the shrines and the Emperor. But...

“Yasuhira-san, your ancestors moved to the Harmonic World in that era, didn’t they?”

“It seems so. Our ancestors wished to support the people who had moved to the northern

lands, so they too moved to the north of the Harmonic World.”

“I see,” said Asama with a nod.

“Hold on. I have a question.”

Naomasa raised her false right arm. She must have still been a little drunk because her cheeks were still flushed, but she spoke clearly enough.

“Hiraizumi Representative, you said they wanted to support the people who had moved to the northern lands, right? But let me ask you something. What could you do to support them in the Age of Dawn? The other nations hadn’t been able to live in the colonies they set up in the outside world, so how could you support them in the northern Harmonic Territory that recreated that environment? ...How did you do it?”

Naomasa tilted her head.

“If all you did was go with them, you both would’ve been wiped out. But you still exist as a race. What in the world did you do?”

That is an excellent question, thought Yasuhira in silent astonishment.

It was Musashi’s 6th Special Duty Officer who had asked. Based on her race, she was likely from Kantou’s Qing-Takeda. Her skin color suggested she was from the southern region, but even the south had mountain Harmonic Territories that became frigid lands during the winter.

But, thought Yasuhira.

“Let me ask you instead, as I believe you already know the answer.”

Musashi’s representatives looked confused, but that did not matter. A testing smile appeared in Yasuhira’s heart as she asked her question.

“What did we use to support the northern Harmonic Territories?”

Hori-ko: “All right. Fess up, whoever it is. If you’re honest, I won’t be angry with you.”

Me: “Okay! When I dropped my spoon at the Blue Thunder before, it was on purpose.”

<Me’s divine transmission has been cut off. There is an 87% possibility it was due to a solid impact. Do you approve?> **Hori-ko:** “This is a pain, so does anyone have a guess?”

Gold Mar: “If Bara-yan was here, I bet he’d be delighted to answer.”

10ZO: “Would someone from Kantou or Oushuu know? Maybe it’s something they didn’t realize they knew.”

Righteousness: “Sorry, but I’ve never heard anything about this. Satomi has a lot of long-lived, but we were the ones that left Oushuu... Our knowledge of the Age of Dawn isn’t much better than yours.”

Laborer: “I unfortunately don’t know anything either.”

Silver Wolf: “I made sure to learn about the current heads of the clans, but I didn’t learn much about the past... Still, maybe we learned something about that when speaking with Lady Yoshitsune at IZUMO.”

Me: “Then I guess there’s only one answer: the topknot.”

Hori-ko: “What a coincidence, Toori-sama. I was thinking exactly the same thing. The topknot. A strange act that draws out someone’s affection just by placing it on their head.”

Wise Sister: “Yes, you two. I was thinking that as well. During the Age of Dawn, the people must have dealt with the cold of those frigid lands by topknotting each other for warmth. There are a lot of those Jizou statues that are a variation on the traveler’s deity, but those must have been there so people could do the topknot on their own!”

Asama: “They’d get frostbite. And you need to bow down and apologize to every single Jizou out there, Kimi. ...Anyway, Masazumi, you got to speak with Lady Yoshitsune a lot, so can you think of anything?”

Vice President: “Yes, actually. It’s probably the Divinely Ordained Prayer Academies.”

Almost Everyone: “If you knew the answer, why didn’t you say anything!?”

Have you never heard of timing? sighed Masazumi.

But that was the only thing she could think of, so she faced Yasuhira and spoke.

“Yoshitsune told us the Divinely Ordained Prayer Academies were the oldest of the academies.”

Yoshitsune had mentioned that name as a clue concerning the Princess Disappearances.

“At the end of the Age of Dawn, the imperial forces must have established an organization in

Oushuu to maintain stability there since the worst of the fighting had occurred there. Was it also meant to provide help in developing the Harmonic Divine States? This may just be speculation, but am I wrong?”

Naruze heard a voice.

It was laughter, and it came from Yasuhira’s crescent moon smile as she looked to the sky.

...*What is this?*

Why would she laugh at that? wondered Naruze as Margot nodded next to her. Margot spun her fingertip in a circle next to her head and Naruze could not help but agree.

“What’s so funny?”

“Oh...it’s just been so long since I last heard that name.”

“That means those academies actually existed, doesn’t it?”

Yasuhira responded to Masazumi’s question while turning her body around.

“Now, then. You’ve taken this to an interesting place. And...”

And...

“I would be correct in assuming that is the limit of your knowledge concerning a consensus about Oushuu, wouldn’t I? Of course, our knowledge at this point is no more than oral traditions from our ancestors.”

“What will you do?” asked Masazumi. “To prepare for Musashi’s discussion with Oushuu, I believe we have told you everything we know or can speculate about Oushuu. From here on, our current knowledge is not enough. So...”

“If you would like to know more about Oushuu, it would indeed seem you need to hear it from me.”

“Are you willing to tell us?”

Yasuhira responded with a calm action: she stood up.

She was preparing to leave, but...

“That is enough discussion for now. The rest of the story moves beyond the Age of Dawn. ...I

think we should end our discussion for today now that we have finished explaining how Oushuu becoming the Far East's enemy."

"Judge. Understood."

Masazumi nodded toward Yasuhira and then asked what she had to ask.

"Have we reached a consensus on Oushuu's history of resistance?"

"I believe you have the same knowledge as us. And you did not hear it from me... You were able to describe it from the victor's viewpoint of a Shinto representative."

Yasuhira formed a small smile on the corner of her lips.

"Yes. To be honest, I can empathize with our ancestors and speak of their grudges and hard feelings as if they were our own," she said. "But we are not our ancestors. And I also think our ancestors decided to assist the Harmonic Divine States in order to ensure we would not become the descendants of losers."

"Very true. After winning out over the harsh environment of the Harmonic Divine States and supporting Oushuu, your race can be called victors."

"Yes. ...Now, Victors of the Dawn."

Yasuhira turned to Asama and Asama brought her knees together.

"What is it?"

"Victors of the Dawn, you said quite a lot while remaining sensitive to the fact that your history is the history of the victors. But...do not show that sensitivity any longer."

"_____"

"You are the victors, but if you are sensitive to that fact, you make us the losers. ...Our ancestors lost during the Age of Dawn, but they did not lose after that. So..."

"Yes." Asama nodded and relaxed her shoulders. "A lot has happened, but I think we can both become victors from now on. Does Oushuu Hiraizumi agree?"

"Of course. ...If we can stand on the side of victory, we have no complaints. So..."

Yasuhira looked to Masazumi.

“Win tomorrow’s special student general assembly, Musashi Vice President. ...Oushuu has no intention of losing any further. If you will win, we will join you. That is the consensus we offer you. ...Oushuu and the Far East will win together. That is all.”

“Is Musashi good enough for you?”

Masazumi asked just to be sure and Yasuhira put on a calm expression while speaking from her thinly opened mouth.

“Your goal is the retrieval of the Logismoi Oplo and end of the Apocalypse. Your method is world domination. But you understand and are thinking of Oushuu and Hiraizumi’s past. I heard as much from a Shinto representative as well as a politician.”

So...

“What you are doing has not strayed from the goal of Anti-Degradation Pro-Tuning: strengthening destiny to obtain a destiny that does not lead to destruction. We have no reason to reject that. And either way, we will be victorious in the end. That is the way of the long-lived and our ancestors are proving it through us now.”

Her expression changed there.

“Do you have any chance of victory at tomorrow’s special student general assembly?”

“I already told you. Ookubo’s faction has the same goal as we do and I trust that they understand the most expedient means to that end. It does not matter if we win or lose. Everything will return to the way it was.”

“Then...I suppose I will trust you.”

Those are some heavy words, thought Masazumi. This was the trust of someone whose ancestors had once sacrificed themselves out of trust for those who had already betrayed them. So...

“Everything will return to normal tomorrow. And then...”

“Yes. We will discuss what came after the Dawn. We will discuss how our ancestors became winners rather than losers. Rather than a consensus of the past, we will reach a consensus on what led Oushuu to what it is today.”

Yes.

“I will tell you as much as I know about the Divinely Ordained Prayer Academies.”

“Judge.” Masazumi nodded and realized they were surrounded by fog. “That means returning

things to the way they were has real meaning now.”

“Being able to share our enjoyment is yet another form of entertainment. ...Even now, I am indebted to Lady Yoshitsune.”

Yasuhira vanished into the fog.

She vanished silently and suddenly. It was a very fitting departure for her.

Once everyone realized the negotiations were over for the time being, they released a sigh. But...

“...?”

Masazumi saw a new divine transmission sign frame open. It was sent from the Musashi, so she assumed something had happened inside the Ariake, but then Asama quickly looked up.

“Um, they finally found Futayo! And...she’s in the Blue Thunder! The one on Tama!”

Chapter 50: Rester in a Small Space

第五十章

『狭所の休憩者』



いつの間にか
自分はどうして
こうなってしまったのか
配点（成長過程）

When

And why

Did I end up like this?

Point Allocation (Process of Growth)

Musashi Ariadust Academy's library was filled with voices even though it was night.

Everyone had already gathered around Sanyou and Azuma at the table in the back and they were discussing various topics centered on Oushuu's history and geography.

Some of the students were originally from Oushuu, Kantou, or Sviet Rus, so they had a chance to discuss their former home. Others were learning some new details about their friends and neighbors.

Watching from a short distance were those who had arrived to check out a book to help with some late night boredom, and...

“...”

Ookubo was there alone.

Two bookcases away, she listened to Sanyou and the others speak while she received a divine transmission report from Kanou.

Kanou spoke from the sign frame next to her face.

“Milady, we have located the Vice Chancellor. I will send you the location.”

“...The Blue Thunder? It's the Tama one, so wouldn't that be the Chancellor's family's bakery?”

“Judge. One of our people is nearby, so I will send them over.”

“Judge. Make it accurate. I don't want a repeat of last time. Do this right, okay?”

After answering quietly, Ookubo closed the sign frame.

She took a breath and placed her hand on the book before her.

It was the Taikoki^[3], a work of fiction about the merchant-turned-drummer HIDE-yoshi's rise to power. The series was still being released, but Volume 3 was checked out. That was the volume where he was caught sniffing and licking his beloved upperclassman NOB-naga's stage sandals, claimed he had simply been keeping them in his pocket to warm them, and continued insisting as much even as he was punished.

...There are a lot with the same title, so it must be hard to tell if someone hasn't returned it.

Ookubo heard laughter from the table and she suddenly pulled out the book she had her hand on.

“_____”

She pondered whether to put the book back or not.

After all, she had looked through plenty of documents already, so she had no intention of checking out this book. She had only grabbed it because she thought she would seem more at place here with one in her hand.

Why was she here? Because of the discussions and conversations she could hear.

...That must be nice.

She had been so focused on taking action lately that she had not had any time to relax. She had been doing nothing but meet with the members of other committees to make deals and show her concern.

“What I'm saying is the snow would pile up to easily three meters and just bury the academy.”

“And they didn't collapse? How were the roofs made?”

“The Sviet Rus school buildings on the Russia side of things have tower and dome roofs that look like onions, so the snow doesn't matter. Ours had flat roofs, though, so when it snowed, some selected students had to periodically apply heat spells to the roof to melt the snow. In a hurry, they'd send out a shovel unit.”

She felt as if she had not heard casual conversations like this in a while.

She started feeling like she was a part of it, so when she heard the occasional laughter, she nearly laughed herself.

...But I can't be part of them.

No one had noticed her or maybe they were simply ignoring her, but was she being overly self-conscious to assume she would seem out of place if she did try to join them?

She was not sure.

She simply felt the people in that circle knew her upperclassmen more than they did her. She did not speak much, so even the people in her own class were more familiar with the crossdressing Vice President or the Chancellor who would head home from school as a nudist, a crossdresser, or both.

...Wh-why do our superiors go with clothing jokes so much?

That was a new discovery. She decided to use that in her accusations tomorrow if she could.

“But for now...I should probably head back.”

She had acquired all the material she needed. The best way to prepare for the upcoming special student general assembly was to let her body rest. She was also curious about their person who had gone to the Vice Chancellor. So...

...Time to leave.

She returned the book with that in mind, but...

“Ookubo-san. You’re the last one! How about it!?”

Sanyou suddenly called out to her.

Azuma looked in the direction Sanyou had called.

A figure in glasses and a red stole poked out from behind a bookcase. She had a long sleeve over her left arm and Sanyou’s voice caused her to stumble on her way to the hallway.

...Is she unsure what to do?

It looked like she had been hesitating over whether to check out a book or not and that she had decided to leave without checking it out. It was possible Azuma’s group had been too loud. But...

“This is what the betting is up to now!”

Sanyou indicated the sweets, rice balls, and other snacks piled up on the table. After the history lesson, those who had not wanted to leave had started a trivia and region quiz and

those prizes had naturally appeared.

The winner only got to take one thing from the pile, but that included the wrapped PG Kiritanpo that Oriotorai had given Sanyou. They had just been discussing how it could be “Perfect Grade” inside a wrapper, whether that was maybe a typo, or if the given weight was a little *too* realistic. They had concluded that this was actually a punishment game.

Ookubo came to a stop and looked back toward Sanyou.

“Um, I...”

“If it’s about tomorrow, this doesn’t count.”

Everyone exchanged a glance at Sanyou’s comment. Some of them had known who Ookubo was already and some only just now caught on. Others were confused, received an explanation from someone next to them, and nodded in what may have been surprise or admiration.

However, Ookubo’s hesitation seemed real and Azuma realized why.

“Please, can’t you help us out here?”

He called out to her too and Ookubo shrugged, but...

“I can’t refuse a request from a teacher and Azuma-sama.”

She nodded, straightened her back, and walked over.

She was not timid. There were a lot of third years in the circle of people, but she approached while simply nodding at them.

“Sorry if we get too noisy.”

She faced the entrance, held her hands together, and gave a quick bow.

Everyone else did the same. Sanyou did as well, so Azuma followed suit.

There was a management household shrine at the entrances to all the school’s rooms and it applied divine protections to anyone who entered.

The library’s restricted noise and Azuma had heard it was more effective if it was periodically reset with some worship, but...

“Azuma-kun, you probably know since you’re in Class Plum, but there are rumors that a ghost appears in this school’s library. Well, I guess it’s a pretty stereotypical part of a school’s

seven mysteries.”

Sanyou had likely directed that to him because of the ghost hunt during the spring. That was in fact where the girl Sanyou held had come from, but...

...I wonder if this girl is that ghost.

Ookubo must have wondered the same thing because she looked to the girl and spoke.

“I’ve heard about that from Principal Sakai before. The Musashi had its major remodeling ten years ago, but it was also remodeled about thirty years ago. The ghost started appearing after that old remodeling and stopped appearing after the one ten years ago.”

“An older remodeling? What did they do?”

“Judge.” Ookubo nodded and calmly answered. “The Musashi was created 160 years ago as a basic fleet. At the time, it had a port and starboard ship plus two central ships for four in all, but as its trade activities grew, so did the crew. First, two ships were added as port and starboard diplomatic ships and then the port and starboard ships were added thirty years ago. Also...”

Also...

“The old school building that was here was remodeled as the basis for the current Musashi Ariadust Academy.”

“That’s right,” agreed Sanyou. “Until the major remodeling when Principal Sakai transferred here ten years ago, the Student Council managed things like the Musashi’s course, so the main bridge was here. According to the records, the library was used as the OS management room and it was the center of the ship’s ether pathways. ...But during the major remodeling ten years ago, ‘Musashi’-san and the others were gathered, the four additional ships were made official ships, and the current arrangement was established.”

“Then the ghost was...?”

“Judge. It’s said the lingering ether created afterimages of the people who came here to check out books. But it might have been real since a ghost living on a ship is seen as the spirit of the ship. That’s why it’s said that those ghosts exist in the library or other parts of the Musashi as things that ‘don’t exist but are still there’.”

Sanyou held her hands together toward the library entrance.

“So this place is a little different. ...But if you’re worried, you just have to make sure to bow whenever you pass through any entrance. The god’s will has been sent out to all of the

different household shrines.”

“I see,” said Azuma with a nod as Sanyou pushed the pile of snacks his way.

“Have a reward for understanding that, Azuma-kun.”

“S-sure.”

He did not want to try his hand at that punishment game, but did that mean he lacked a spirit of adventure? *Miriam might laugh at me*, he thought as he heard Ookubo’s voice.

“Sanyou-sensei, what is the current topic?”

She tilted her head and spoke to the others.

“I am waiting for word on something else, so I can join in until then.”

A room was lit by a few torch spells.

It was a traditional Far Eastern style room and piles of barrels, firewood, and food nearly reached the ceiling.

Someone’s gaze looked weakly up and realized this was the Blue Thunder.

It was Futayo. She leaned her head back in her chair and blinked a few times while staring at the ceiling.

“...Nh?”

Strange, she thought.

Her surroundings and her position were not what she had expected.

After the battle in Mito, she recalled somehow getting aboard a ship to Ariake and then passing out there. She had been injured, so she had assumed she would be carried to the school’s medical room or some other medical facility. However...

...This is...?

“Oh, are you awake, Futayo-chan?”

“Eh?”

She heard a voice to her right, so she turned toward it and found the manager there. *She really does look like Kimi-dono. Don't ask me about the crossdresser, though.* But...

...Nh?

Something was indeed not right. Why was she in the Blue Thunder? She had been fighting in Mito. She had fought Fukushima Masanori, and...

"I was injured when the Tonbo Spare failed to activate..."

She touched her body, but she did not feel the unique stinging pain felt when pressing on an injury.

She was not injured.

She assumed that meant she was fully healed, but that was due to her clear memories from the day. Masazumi and the others had been there and it had not been her fight alone. That allowed her to at least say that battle had been real.

How much time had passed since then?

She looked to the clock on the wall and found it was eleven o'clock. There was light outside the window, but that was likely because it was not the lights out test period. It was eleven at night. There were a total of two customers: one in the back wearing a lab coat and one at the entrance wearing a hood.

As she watched the hands of the clock move, Futayo noted that time was indeed moving and yet the events around her were odd.

...What does this mean?

When she looked up to ask the manager, she saw a butt on the edge of the table. It was the manager's. The woman placed a bamboo bottle and a wrapped piece of bread in front of Futayo, and...

"I just received a data letter from my husband. Want to see it?"

"Eh?"

...Her husband?

Futayo was at a loss for words because it was so sudden, but the manager used her foot to pull over the divine monitor stand. She pulled an envelope from her apron pocket and pulled

a charm from that.

It was a special charm that contained audiovisual information inside.

The surface was almost entirely covered in black compressed writing, so it had to contain high density data and prayers. The manager attached it to the top of the divine monitor and operated it with the sign frame that appeared by her hands.

“And play. I wonder where he is now.”

Futayo did not really understand, but she looked at the screen while tilting her head. A few confirmation texts scrolled by, and...

“Oh.”

As the manager leaned forward, the blue sky and the colors white and black appeared on the screen.

The ground was a vast hole and a single white bridge crossed it below the floating fog and blue sky.

...*What is this?*

“That idiot had Suga or Nabe head out ahead of him to film him as he crossed, didn’t he?”

A pink arrow and the word “here” appeared above the suspension bridge. The black dot moving below the arrow must have been the manager’s husband.

The wind could be heard blowing, but a voice spoke over it. It was a man’s voice.

“Hey, it’s been a while. What do you think of this scenery, Toori, Kimi?”

The manager shut off the video and glared at the sign frame to the blacked-out monitor.

“Your wife is supposed to come first. Your wife. It was addressed to me.”

At that very moment, the café’s door opened and a student carrying a delivery bag walked in.

“Sorry! This arrived shortly after the previous data letter! It’s labeled a ‘reshoot’!”

“Judge. Then I’ll forgive him. ...I can sign for it via sign frame, right? And can you leave the door open? It helps air the place out and I can tell if they’re still at it out there.”

“Judge.”

The delivery student placed the envelope on the counter.

The manager peeled the previous charm from the monitor and spoke with her back turned.

“Hey, Futayo-chan? Can you go get that from the counter? Sorry about making you do this.”

“Eh? Of course. I don’t mind.”

“Judge. Yes, I really am sorry.”

No need to be so apologetic, thought Futayo as she walked to the counter.

She honestly had no idea why any of this was happening. Also...

...That video.

With that much snow, that had probably been Sviet Rus. But that large shadow on the ground had to have been a hole. Where was there a hole that big? And...

“...?”

She felt like she recognized that video from somewhere. Not the scenery. Her time on the Musashi was her only experience outside of Mikawa. If she recognized it, it had to be the layout.

A suspension bridge and a deep darkness. She thought about that layout.

...Oh.

It came to her. It was from the night before when she had left the Blue Thunder, and...

...On the way to Musashino, I crossed the still unbuilt atrium on a rope passageway.

No, that was technically not accurate. She had tried to cross and been attacked.

“...!”

Then too, she had been injured and fallen from the passageway, but she had come to in the Blue Thunder with no injuries, having been asleep.

“Manager...?”

She turned to ask the manager what that was about, but the woman cut her off.

“You forgot this.”

She tossed Futayo the Tonbo Spare.

At the same time, there were two movements.

The first was the hooded customer by the entrance standing up and drawing a sword from each hip. The second was a short figure rushing in through the open door.

“Vice Chancellor!”

It was an unfamiliar figure and voice, but the wind approaching her was sharp.

As she sensed its strength, a third motion arrived.

It came from the window. The large window covering one side of the Blue Thunder was shattered as three figures jumped through it.

And...

“...!?”

Darkness fell. It was not time for the lights out testing. Someone had shut off the lights in the Tama district.

And in that darkness, a multi-sided battle began.

Chapter 51: Bent Girl in a Crouching Place

第五十一章

『屈み所の屈折娘』



折れて曲がって
屈して零して
それでも何処へと
我は行く
配点 (戦場)

Even as I bend and turn

Even as I crouch and spill

Where is it

I am headed?

Point Allocation (Battlefield)

The Blue Thunder was too spacious to call cramped and too cramped to call spacious.

There were tables and a counter to move around and the pathways were too clear to hide in or escape through. As the lights went out and darkness surrounded her, Futayo realized a battle was beginning.

...What do I do!?

She had to move.

The unforeseen was common in battle and she had never fought in such confused circumstances before.

She had never before had so much to be worried about.

After all, she held the Tonbo Spare which had yet to activate for her, this was the workplace of the princess she served, she was worried about the manager, and most importantly...

“...?”

She suddenly recalled her defeat during the battle in Mito that day.

She was the Vice Chancellor and she had lost.

...So if I lose again here...

But as soon as that thought came to her...

“_____”

Oh, no, she thought. I'm letting those bad thoughts trap me again.

“So they’ve made their move.”

Someone dressed as a maid nodded in the shadows to agree with the girl’s voice coming from a sign frame.

It was Kanou. She stood in the newly assembled shopping district of Tama’s surface area. After pretending to take a break between shops built around some water, she made sure the ceiling and surrounding sign frames had their illumination off and expressionlessly opened her mouth.

“We somehow made it in time, milady. But...”

“But?”

Kanou tilted her head and opened a sign frame.

“The Vice Chancellor’s actions are quite different from our statistical data. And they have been ever since arriving at the Ariake.”

“I can more or less guess why that is.”

“That being?”

“Judge,” replied Ookubo on the sign frame. “She was raised too well, and...”

There was a slight pause and then a sigh.

“Well, it doesn’t matter. We don’t have time to worry about others right now. But...”

But...

“The Vice Chancellor might destroy herself here and have to retire.”

Futayo sensed her mind instantly cooling.

...*Oh, no.*

She was aware of the same failure she had felt so many times recently.

She had done it again.

She was in battle or very nearly so, yet her mind had started moving before her body. And instead of thinking about battle, she was only thinking dark thoughts about herself.

She knew why that was.

If she lost here, her failure from that day would be joined by a second failure. That pressure created these thoughts that cornered her.

She had to stop this. She had to avoid these thoughts that caused her to freeze up.

But those thoughts told her this was her last chance, and...

...That's the truth.

If she did not allow herself to think about the truth, did that mean she was not looking at reality?

And during the battle that day, Fukushima Masanori had called her a coward.

What about now? In the face of this battle, she was hesitating and had a lot on her mind.

...Kh!

She saw a light. It was directly ahead when she turned her back to the counter. The figure who had been sitting by the entrance had drawn two blades which were reflecting the light. Futayo felt she needed to face them, but a short figure was also rushing in from the entrance on the left.

And in the back on the right, three figures had broken in through the window and were landing on a table while surrounded by glass shards.

She could see them and a few ideas of how to handle them came to mind, but...

“_____”

For some reason, thoughts raced through her mind and she hesitated.

This is strange, thought Futayo. After the Sack of Magdeburg and the Battle of Mikatagahara, she had seen many different powers and ways of expressing one's will and she had lost her weapon.

...I...

I was broken by that, she thought while unable to move.

She lacked the will needed to face battle.

She had seen many wills: Anne as she supported Hexagone Française, Matsunaga as he rebelled against Nobunaga and perished, Yoshitsune as she tried to protect Kantou and the whole east, Satomi Yoshiyori as he saved the Musashi, and even Fukushima and Katou more recently.

Thinking back, Muneshige, Gin, Katsuie, and Takakane had been the same.

And not just them. All of the officers and name inheritors had the wills necessary to risk their lives and achieve results.

What was she compared to them?

She may have had strength, skill, and a weapon, but...

...Did I have the will needed to risk my life and achieve results?

She had not.

She had an obvious reason for saying that: she was inexperienced.

So her intent had been to endure battle more than it had been to fight with the will to win.

“...!”

She understood now why she was a coward.

It went back to the Sack of Magdeburg and the Battle of Mikatagahara.

She had been admonished through the results of those battles.

Tonbokiri had been destroyed.

She had been unable to dodge the attack from the arbalest Logismoi Oplo.

That should have been obvious. As nothing more than a simple job, she had chosen to endure Katsuie's attacks. That would have made it easy to target her weapon.

If she had actually been moving around and fighting, she doubted she would have been hit by that kind of sniper attack.

Then, thought Futayo. Then could I have fought Katsuie back then?

She knew she could not have. She had used the strategy she did because she could not have fought him properly.

But, she thought.

Hadn't she needed to risk her life and achieve results there?

If she had risked her life and aimed for victory, wouldn't she have avoided that sniper attack?

That was the past. This was nothing more than regret. But she was trapped by that wish that she had done things differently. And as if repeatedly admonishing her, leaders of other lands had achieved results and protected them.

What had she done? Why had she been unable to do what they had?

She had her father's divine weapon, but she had used it in an inexperienced fashion. That had to be why the Tonbo Spare's identical thought patterns would not allow her its power.

...I...

She had strength and skill, but didn't she lack the most important thing needed to stand on the battlefield?

What about when she had attempted the wall climbing training before? When Muneshige had noticed her losing speed and reached out his hand, had she tried to take that hand?

Had she perhaps rejected it because she was not qualified to take that hand which had an actual will behind it?

Then even here and now, was she not the least worthy of anyone to stand on the battlefield?
So...

“_____”

Yes, she thought.

The question was not what she should do.

It was *whether she should be here at all.*

It was because she did not know if she should be here or not that she had not known what to do. She had needed permission from herself on a more fundamental level before she could do anything.

...To lack resolve is to meet failure.

And as all this filled her mind, she failed to move.

It was not that she did not move.

She could not move. She felt her failed actions would sully the battlefield.

And so she prepared to simply watch it play out, but then...

“Enemy order!!!!”

A sharp voice pierced through the many sounds filling the shop.

The voice sent a tremor down Futayo’s back.

It was not a shout or a raised voice. It was simply a command meant to convey an objective.

...*Enemy order*...

She was supposed to confirm the order of the enemies attacking her.

Why? she wondered. *I don’t belong here.*

But...

“_____”

Her body reacted.

Futayo’s vision rather than eyes perceived rather than followed the enemy’s location and movements. Who would she have to oppose first?

It was not the three who had jumped in through the window. They were still landing on the table.

Then what about the small figure that had rushed in through the door and was the closest to her? They had great speed and were moving toward her.

But she decided they were not the answer either.

She was inside a building and in the dark. Someone who had just rushed in would not have accurately located her.

In that case, she thought as she looked to her enemy. She looked to the figure that had stood from a seat by the entrance and drawn two blades.

She then realized this was the same person who had attacked her on the rope passageway.

In that case, they were definitely targeting her.

As proof, there was light behind them.

There was an adjacent shop beyond the window, but the light came from behind that. Power was handled by block and that proved that the areas besides Tama had not gone dark.

From the perspective of the person with the two blades, Futayo would be dimly illuminated. And they had to have known that would be the case.

...That's why they wore the hood to prepare their eyes for the shift to darkness!

This was a planned crime done by a group and not an individual. Once she realized that, she heard another voice.

“Confirm!!!!”

At the same time, all of the movements shifted to the next stage.

The two blades in front of her flew forward without building up any strength first

The figure who had rushed in from the entrance on the left spun around after noticing the two blades coming from the side.

The three who had jumped through the window landed on the table.

But she had to focus on what was straight ahead.

She looked there, and...

“_____!?”

The two blades moved faintly off course in reaction to the small figure charging in from Futayo's left.

They slightly lifted the blade in their right hand to avoid the small figure.

They could see them, and perhaps that was why...

“Dodge while you have the chance!!!!”

Futayo's actions and decisions were both performed weakly.

She seemed to be hesitating and double-checking, but...

“Kh.”

She moved forward with her spear in hand. She did not even silencing her footsteps and her legs moved stiffly, but she knew what she had to do: move straight forward and dodge to the left and below the two blades.

So she did so. She took more steps to slip below her opponent's somewhat raised right blade.

Her goal was to her left: the wall by the entrance.

She made her way there, but the enemy moved at the same time.

The two blades ahead of her were swung.

The timing was off if it was to hit her, but...

“...!?”

She sensed some form of danger, so she raised her hips as she moved forward. She took a stance resembling a crouch start and kicked powerfully forward. She forcibly launched herself forward. Her stance was off balance.

“...”

And she tripped. Her right shoulder hit the floor, but she used that point of contact to rotate her body and curl up for a compact roll to the side. Just as she slipped past the blade-wielding enemy on their right, the floor was sliced apart behind her where she had just been.

It looked like a dull blade had forcibly torn the floor apart and there were two such lines next to each other.

Futayo understood what had happened, but she could not understand how it had happened.

...The enemy's blades pursued me on the inside?

Charging right up to an armed opponent was one standard method, but this opponent's sword technique was different. She did not understand how, but this opponent did not have a

defenseless spot right in front of them.

Futayo had dodged, but not because she had realized this. She had simply sensed a cold movement of air behind her and had tried to escape that presence.

If she had not done so, she would have been cut.

Then she saw her opponent.

“...”

She saw a sharp gaze staring at her from within the hood.

The opponent moved. They easily leaped atop a table without taking their eyes off of her.

She understood why. The small figure who had charged in from the entrance had rushed in and swung up their weapon.

It was a striking weapon. It was a hammer.

Futayo then recalled that it had been these people who had attacked her on the rope passageway the night before. The one with the two high-speed blades had attacked first. And the one who had come afterwards had been...

“Dodge!!!”

She chose action over thoughts of the past.

She moved below the table, and...

...The extension device!

The bottom of the spear jabbed into the wall next to the entrance and Futayo flew horizontally just off the floor in a face up position.

First, she slipped between the chairs and below the table by the entrance.

“_____”

In that instant, two lines were torn in the table above her.

The owner of the two blades was on top.

Plus, there was movement at her destination. Three figures jumped down between the entrance table she was passing below and the table further back.

It was the three who had jumped in through the window. They wore black and held swords as they dropped down and moved to cut off her path.

...*What*...

Before she could think “do I do?”, a dignified voice pierced through her entire being.

“Respond!!!!”

All of the movements received definite results.

The three who had rushed between the tables felt their blades hit and the hooded figure on the table definitely sliced their target in two.

But none of those attacks had hit a person.

“...!”

The three who had jumped down between the tables had pierced a chair with their swords.

The chair had been knocked out from under the table so it would match the timing of their fall. The three of them had dropped down to strike their target with their full bodies, so they had been unable to dodge or deflect it. Even if they had been able to confirm it was a chair, they had been too cautious to carelessly dodge or alter their stance and their swords had stabbed halfway into the chair.

At the same time, the hooded figure on the table had swung their two blades.

“Toh.”

They had sliced the table itself.

The two lines of damage had not reached Futayo below. This was because the table had risen up enough to make the hooded figure’s legs bend.

That was proof that Futayo had kicked the table up from the floor.

Musashi’s Vice Chancellor pressed her back to the floor and kicked straight up to launch the table upwards. That had stopped her horizontal movement and allowed the chair she hit with her arm to act as bait.

“Once more!!!!”

Futayo reacted to the voice she heard.

Tonbo Spare had stopped extending and she launched its extension toward the entrance once more.

She quickly slipped below the next table and launched herself into the passageway by the back wall.

But she heard a certain sound ahead of her.

Tonbo Spare's blade had stabbed into the back wall. The impact caused her to spin around by the wall.

"Phew."

She took a breath as she placed her curled-up body in a crouching pose and landed facing the entrance. She was below the counter seats by the back wall. To her right, Tonbo Spare was stabbed into the wall near the floor.

At the same time, the hooded figure moved to the closer table. It was a light almost floating step, but their waist was tilted deeply forward as they swung their two swords.

"_____"

The two rapid strikes sliced into the wall above Futayo's head and quickly descended.

Futayo felt herself breathing heavily and felt warm tears in the corners of her eyes.

...*Why...*?

She did not know.

She had nearly died several times since this battle began.

That threat remained. It had continued the entire time.

And she suspected that she was not qualified to stand on this battlefield.

But...

...*Why am I still alive?*

She did not know. It seemed only natural for her to have died, and that thought had slowed

and weighed down her body.

“Respond!!!!”

As if tearing her body free of that sinking sensation, she took a breath and moved her body.

She retracted the Tonbo Spare which was stabbed into the wall.

Then she lifted it up at an angle with the stabbed blade as the support.

...There!

She chose a trajectory that targeted the hooded figure who swung two swords toward her, the rightmost of the three figures who were turning toward her from between the tables, and the small figure who wielded a hammer by the wall near the entrance.

...Extension device!

She launched the bottom of the spear on a low trajectory.

The hooded figure dodged. As they swung down their two swords, they acted like they were placing their hands in the air and made a front flip high in the air.

Past the dual blade wielder was the hammer wielder.

“Watch out!”

They made a weightless back dash toward the entrance, but...

“...!”

The spear shaft landed a solid blow on the rightmost of the other three who stood between those two.

It smashed them.

The spear literally did break that rightmost figure. It sounded like metal and wood breaking and noticeably inhuman fragments scattered from it.

...An automaton!?

No. If it had been an automaton, it would have been made of nearly human parts to autonomously function in a human-like life. This was no more than a puppet with clothing wrapped around the motors and frame.

Someone was controlling it.

But Futayo was too preoccupied for that fact to trigger an emotional response. The hooded figure with two swords had taken action directly ahead of her.

After spinning around, swords and all, for a single flip through the air, they spread out their body for the second flip. This swung the two swords down toward Futayo again and also grabbed Tonbo Spare under their left arm.

Tonbo Spare was restrained and retracting its extension device would only bring the two swords closer.

She had lost her weapon and that fact brought doubt to her heart. But...

“_____”

This doubt was different from before.

She wondered if she should be here, but despite how much her failures weighed on her mind...

...*Why?*

Why was her body struggling to survive here? Even now...

“Resupply!!!!”

A voice and an object arrived from the left. The latter was a weapon.

The weapon gave her a more definite means of breaking free of this situation than any instructions could have. The grip was a little large, but...

“Eh?”

When she felt the object in her hand, Futayo looked down.

It was a long loaf of baguette-style bread. It was nearly a meter long, but it was clearly bread rather than a spear or a sword. Then Futayo realized who had been making that dignified voice that had kept her moving.

“Manager-dono!!”

“Hm? What?”

At the edge of Futayo's vision, the woman stood away from the tables in the space between the counter and kitchen. She was smiling in her apron with a baguette in each hand.

Then Futayo saw the manager look at her while smiling with the ends of her eyebrows lowered.

“Respond!!!!”

Futayo felt the woman's sharp voice returning her mind to the battlefield. She doubted she could use a baguette as a weapon, but...

“!”

Just before the two swords swung down at her, she pulled a chair from the table and stood the baguette up on the seat of the chair. And the tip was pointed so it would catch the wielder of the two swords at the bottom of the chest.

Her opponent chose a safe method.

They pulled their hips back and let the baguette's tip pass above their right shoulder.

She had altered their movement, but she had not stopped them. They had pulled back, but the two swords were still within striking range.

But Futayo was also on the move. She swung her body left, toward the manager.

The two swords changed their course in response. The sword in the opponent's right hand was closer, so they reversed that wrist in midair and...

...They let go!?

No, they then grabbed the hilt in the opposite direction.

“...!?”

Rather than swing the blade down, it was now being pulled in a diagonal slash. And the tip of the reverse-hand strike would catch her on the back.

This attack was coming from her blind spot.

“Dodge!!!!”

She swung her body to the left with all her might and she felt something cold pass through her right shoulder from back to front.

Just as she thought she was being cut, she moved on reflex.

She spun around and let the sword strike from behind pass along the roundness of her shoulder.

She let it cut her, but she kept the damage to a minimum.

“—————!”

Her movements were awkward. It was a far cry from her ideal and she did not have it in her to add in her acceleration spell Soaring Wings.

But she did leap to the left. Her feet slid and she landed in a crouching stance to the left of the manager. The position and stance placed her right in front of the space between the entrance table and back table.

The two people...no, the two puppets still functioning of the three that had jumped in through the window turned her way and drew short swords from behind their waists.

One moved in front of the other and they charged forward while keeping low to the ground, but...

“Yes, Futayo-chan. Coming here was a good decision.”

The manager held her two baguettes at waist height.

“There are two between the tables in front of us, but the one in the back is meaningless with the other blocking the way in the front. And that twin sword girl also can’t launch her best attack with that one in the front.”

But, thought Futayo. *What do we do about weapons?* It was true baguettes were hard, but striking or jabbing with them would only produce a light blow.

“Watch,” said that dignified voice.

Then the manager began to move. She lightly tossed one of the baguettes toward the puppet as it charged in low to the ground.

...It’s floating up?

“Using ‘tension’.”

A light sound followed.

The manager had made a rapid snap of her right wrist which caught the back end of the

baguette. The whip-like motion of her right arm and hand gave great speed to the baguette.

...*Ah.*

With a breaking sound, the baguette launched toward the puppet's face with the force of an artillery shell.

It hit.

It was only a bread attack, but the puppet was thrown off balance.

A baguette was a hard bread, but it should not have had this much power. So how had this happened?

...*Was it the initial speed!?*



She had not swung it in her hand. She had tossed it up into the air, caught it with her accelerated hand, and launched it.

The high-speed snap of an empty hand had been directly applied to the baguette.

“I need to make that smashed bread into croutons.”

As long as her aim and the bread’s trajectory were true, the damage would reach her target.

Half of the baguette had been crushed and smashed, but her opponent had been knocked off balance.

And it did not end there.

She launched the second one on the left. The sound of a slap came from the manager’s left hand.

“Using ‘leftovers’.”

Her opponent had already been knocked off balance and now a blow hit the outside of their right wrist inwards.

They let go of their short sword. A moment later, the manager had taken a step forward.

When had that happened? Futayo had definitely seen her leg moving forward, but it had seemed more like a “change of position” than a “movement”.

...Did she shift her body’s axis with high-level footwork!?

Rather than walk, she had moved a step forward on the same level that people leaned their body.

And that put her right in front of her opponent.

“Using ‘Futsushatou’^[4].”

After holding the puppet’s arm at the elbow, she grabbed the short sword from the air, and...

“Resupply!!!!”

She tossed it behind her.

The pommel flew straight toward Futayo’s face, so she swept her hand across to catch it and held it in both hands.

“Counterattack!!!!”

Futayo moved forward to do just that. She took a low step with her right leg and lifted her body to the front and right with her left knee and butt while making a diagonal slash.

She moved forward.

As the manager evaded to the left, the puppet slipped past her on the right and Futayo made a slice from its left belly to right shoulder.

Metal could be heard breaking and wood could be heard splitting. Vibrations of cutting and breaking told her she had hit.

A monotone sound told her she had sliced through the backbone.

And just as she realized she had destroyed it...

“Respond again!!”

Futayo understood. The blade continued diagonally up and to the right and she kept it on that path.

...To the right!!

The hooded figure’s right sword flew in toward her head. The attack was made from atop a table and it was almost slippery in how it gently cut through the air with no resistance. But the strike had definite power and it collided with the short sword she had sent out to her right with both hands.

“...”

Sparks were accompanied by the sound of clashing metal.

The instant of light gave her a glimpse inside the hood.

It was a girl and one even younger than her.

But she did not have time to deal with that fact. She used the recoil of the strike from the right to swing her blade down in a leftward arc.

“There!”

Directly ahead, the one surviving puppet was charging toward her. Using both arms to intercept would not arrive in time, so she held the blade in just her left hand and struck from diagonally above.

There was a solid sound and then a sound of destruction as the sword-wielding puppet's arm flew off. Its footsteps grew disordered.

Futayo's blade broke from this hit so soon after the previous blocked sword.

But the puppet's movements grew disordered and it leaped past her on the left to reach the counter. Futayo thought it was a well-executed move. If it had continued running instead of jumping, she would have tripped it.

But Futayo did not pursue the puppet that had lost its weapon arm. She had something else to do now.

...My weapon!

She moved past the manager who had turned sideways to get out of the way and her outstretched arm grabbed Tonbo Spare's shaft as it lay on a table. It was still extended when she grabbed it and she checked on the double sword girl who had moved further back into the shop. She was already leaping to the counter seats in the back and turning to face Futayo.

"...!"

Futayo shrank Tonbo Spare down to its shortest length and used momentum alone to pull its blade from the wall.

Then she noticed the hammer user who had run in through the door was now missing.

"Not surprising. Now that I'm at work, I doubt that kid would be able to look you in the eye."

She did not know what the manager meant by that, but something did happen. Two somethings, in fact.

First, the puppet that had leapt toward the counter now leapt toward the door.

Second, the double sword girl who had kicked off the back wall jumped out the window.

They were fleeing. Futayo prepared to pursue, but...

"Manager-dono!"

She called out and kicked something up from the floor.

They were two chairs with swords stabbed in them. They rose up between her and the window.

But all of a sudden, the two chairs burst to pieces in midair.

They had been shot.

...I knew it!

It had been the same the night before. She had been sniped when attacked by these opponents.

So once she realized the same had not happened this time, she had wondered when it would happen.

“...!!!”

A series of shots arrived. Twenty-one in all. The piercing shots moved left and right as they entered the shop through the window and they destroyed the bread, the opposite window, and the divine monitor.

Of course, Futayo and the manager both crouched down on reflex.

This was not sniper fire. It was covering fire to help the enemy escape.

But those back-and-forth shots ended after the first wave, glass shards fell to the floor, and only one thing remained.

“Is it over?” asked the manager with a sigh.

Futayo nodded as she sat down on the floor. She had not wanted to do so. She had simply been unable to gather any strength in her knees or back as sweat suddenly poured from her body. But...

“Manager-dono.”

A question escaped through her heavy breathing.

“Who are you?”

Through her sweat-soaked bangs, Futayo saw someone stand up.

It was the Blue Thunder’s manager. She removed her oven mitt and held the hand out toward Futayo.

“I, well, used to have an inherited name. And for a time, I worked as a bodyguard for Horizon’s mother.”

As for the name...

“Ono Tadaaki becomes a first generation sword instructor after Matsudaira’s rule begins. That’s my husband. I inherited the name of Zenki who dies in the conflict over who would succeed our master Ittousai. I lost to my husband just as the Testament descriptions said, so I thought it was about time to give up the Zenki name. Since I was working as a bodyguard for Horizon’s mother, I took on the family name of Aoi.”

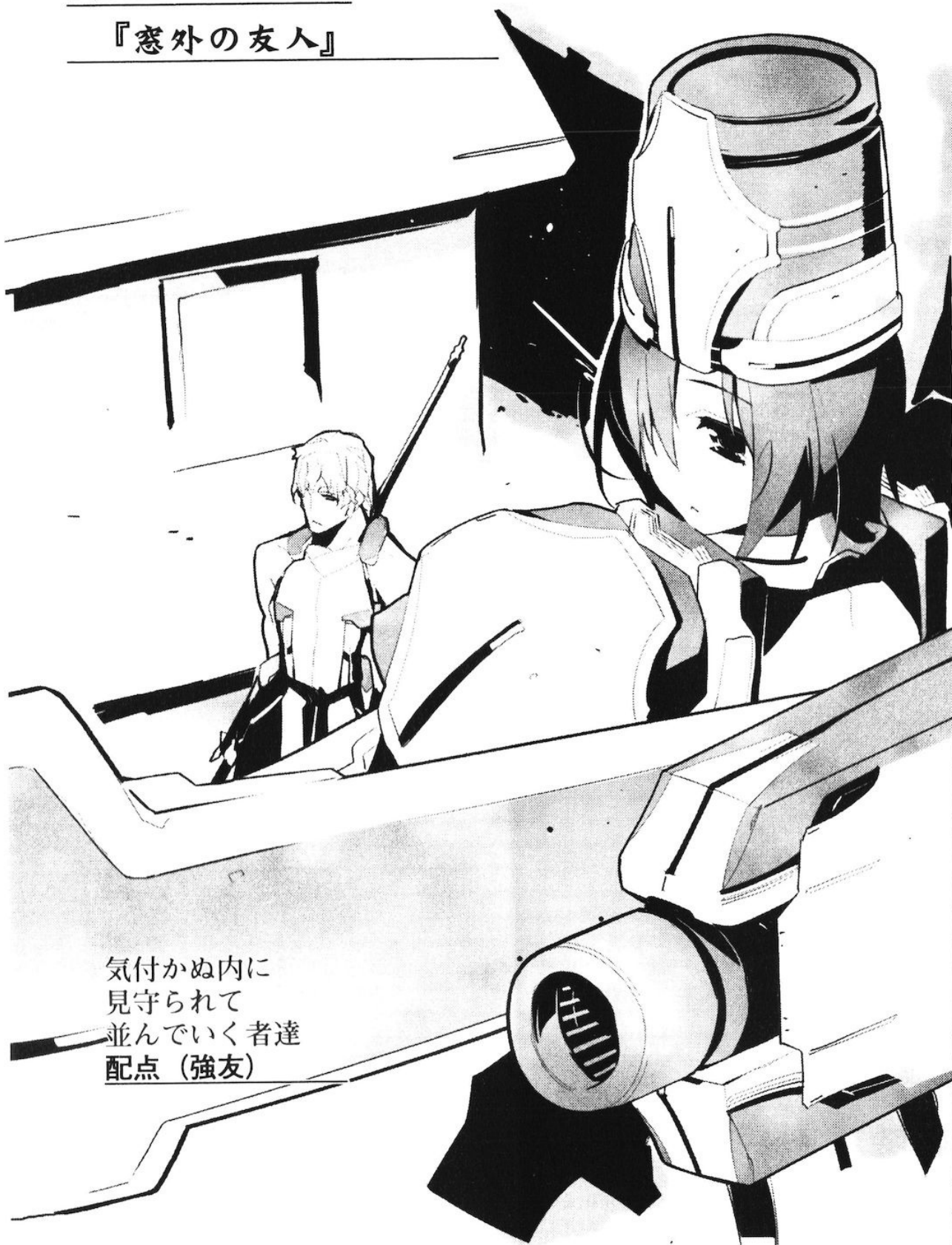
She smiled.

“But instead of Aoi Zenki, I pronounce it Aoi Yoshiki. ...And it looks like I’ve still got my old moves.”

Chapter 52: Friends Outside the Window

第五十二章

『意外の友人』



気付かぬ内に
見守られて
並んでいく者達
配点（強友）

Who watches over you

And stands beside you

Without you even noticing?

Point Allocation (Powerful Friends)

The manager spoke within the Blue Thunder as wooden fragments, glass shards, and the scent of scattered bread filled the air.

“That should settle things for now. ...As someone who’s still very much in the thick of things, what do you think about this, Futayo-chan?”

Futayo breathed in when she heard that question.

...I can’t believe it.

I never knew there was someone so skilled so nearby, she thought.

So she made a move that could have been on a whim or driven by momentum. In the center of the dark battlefield’s remnants, she set her spear down in front of her and bowed down in front of the manager.

“Please.”

She lowered her head so deeply her forehead touched the floor.

“Could you please be my teacher!?”

The answer from overhead only came after a short pause.

“...I’m no good at teaching people.”

“So you won’t do it?”

“Well.” The woman had a bitter smile in her voice. “If my husband were back, I’d ask him.”

“Then...”

Futayo raised her head and saw the manager place her foot on a chair to pull the sword from it. Futayo grabbed the legs of the chair to help and the woman’s bitter smile deepened.

“But my husband isn’t going to conveniently show up now, so I’ll ask when the timing is better. But for now,” she said. “Yes, for now can you help me clean up?”

“That isn’t enough. Please set a table.”

A girl’s voice reached them from the back of the shop. Someone stood up from the back counter seat.

Futayo gasped at this new presence.

...When did she get here!?

There had indeed been someone in a white coat at the counter seat before the battle, but Futayo had not sensed her presence throughout the battle.

The manager apparently had not either. She gave a light whistle and pulled the sword from the chair.

“That’s a strange form of stealth. It doesn’t seem Far Eastern.”

“It is an English-style original spell. ...Since I was working reception at the Ariake event, I stopped by for an errand and discovered you have quite a lot of old books for sale. Then I needed somewhere to read, so I came here for some tea.”

“You hadn’t gotten your toast yet, had you?”

“Add some scrambled eggs if you could. This is going to be my first meal of the day. And I need something for my errand too.”

When Futayo asked about the errand, the girl pushed her glasses up her nose without looking her way.

“A silly hopeful author printed himself on a wall to make his own promotional item. As his superior in the field of writing, I must free him and tell him how inappropriate that was.”

Only after saying that did she look up with narrowed eyes.

“This has to do with the Student Council, but could you show me the way later, Musashi Vice Chancellor? ...Thomas Shakespeare, Trump 6 of England’s Oxford Academy, has answered her invitation.”

But...

“That’s only after I finish reading about eleven more books while I eat.”

“It looks like the Blue Thunder has calmed down,” said a spear-wielding figure on a dimly-lit road.

The boy in a sleeveless summer uniform was Tachibana Muneshige.

He lightly spun around Kamenuki which Sakai had given him and he looked to the top of the row of buildings to port.

Gin stood there. She held her right false arm forward and had summoned one of her Arcabuz Cruz.

She looked across the ship’s stern with the targeting sign frame opened atop the Arcabuz Cruz.

“My kinetic lock was lost partway through. They seem to have used an invisibility spell along their escape route. I believe this resistance is from well-prepared individuals. And... something else bothers me.”

“Judge. There were multiple lines of fire.”

“I should have known you would notice.” Gin looked around and nodded with a slight smile. “Did it remind you of when you noticed Arcabuz Cruz’s multiple firing?”

“I just about answered with ‘testament’.” Muneshige smiled bitterly but tilted his head. “The Vice Chancellor and the manager were hidden inside the Blue Thunder, yet the sniper fire continued from more than one direction. If they had just the one sniper in one location, that would require some very swift movement. It would be best to assume there were multiple snipers, but...”

“Sorry I couldn’t pursue them, Master Muneshige.”

“Oh, I don’t mind, Gin.”

“I will apologize with breakfast tomorrow.”

“...Fish would be nice.”

“I thought as much, so I prepared some excellent bonito. Let’s enjoy this as much as possible.”

“Testament. Then we need to pick up some ginger at the farm district. ...Anyway, I think we

have done enough here.”

Muneshige looked down at his feet. There was a stone foundation pallet which had not had its block of soil laid out yet. Up on the rooftop, Gin spoke to him about what was there.

“That’s the doll that tried to escape from the Blue Thunder. Do you think dolls like this were behind the multiple sniper fire as well?”

“No, I don’t think so. You would not overlook multiple people escaping, Gin, so I think they may have used some kind of special spell.”

The corners of Gin’s mouth tightened and she lowered her eyes.

“Even I overlook things and make mistakes, Master Muneshige. I am not a perfect girl, so it is possible. Please keep that in mind.”

She looked down at his feet again.

The doll had been pierced through the spine by Muneshige’s spear. It had groaned on the foundation pallet a few times and scratched at the stone in an attempt to crawl forward, but it was motionless now.

Gin, however, did not ask about the enemy. She asked about something else instead.

“How was Kamenuki?”

Muneshige’s answer was frank.

“I’m not really sure.”

“Not even someone on your level can tell?” Gin tilted her head. “When we were given Lype Katathlipse, no one knew how to use it and it had no instruction manual or warranty, yet you smiled, said ‘Like this maybe?’, and tore down the secondary school building. At the time, I was impressed by your carefree manliness.”

“Well, I didn’t expect it to be such a good fit for me. I only did the same thing Vice Chancellor Takakane had.”

“Te-...Judge. Although to escape responsibility and punishment, we did use the Gate in the western ocean to do some work in the New World. The Treasurer there, Master Las Casas, helped us out a lot.”

“Move far enough north from the Ariake and you would reach Ezo of the New World. ...I wonder if Casas is still defending the tower there.”

“Yes, I do wonder,” said Gin, but then she smiled a little.

Muneshige looked up as she hid her mouth behind a hand.

“What is it, Gin?”

“Judge. ...It has only been about two months, but things over there seem so nostalgic. At this point, it would be faster to reach Tres España by visiting Ezo of the New World and traveling through the Gate,” commented Gin. “Besides, when we speak of the Vice Chancellor and the others, I think we are only talking about who they were in the past, not who they are now. And when we do meet them all later, I think we will end up speaking about what happened here and what we gained here.”

“Judge. ...Would you call those stories of our journey? Or...would we just be bragging?”

“I’m not sure,” said Gin before asking Muneshige something else. She stored her Arcabuz Cruz in space and used the action to place a hand on her chest. “Do you think the Far East’s summer uniform would look good on me?”

“Judge. I would like to see it at least once.”

“It can’t be just once. You wear uniforms every day.”

“Then how about you switch over after you send your current one for cleaning? Why not get your Arcabuz Cruz and false arms recolored to match?”

“The money, Master Muneshige...”

“Ha ha. I can pay for that much with what I have on hand, so don’t worry. I’m willing to pay if you need me to. I want to see you dressed up in different ways.”

Gin finally nodded and looked away from Muneshige.

“...I’ll pay you back during the change to winter uniforms.”

“You mean you’ll make a winter uniform for me? How wonderful. Please make the shoulders comfortable.”

“N-no, I meant with mon-...”

Gin trailed off and suddenly smiled.

“But I can’t have you thinking I can’t sew. This isn’t easy.”

“Now I have even more to look forward to.” Muneshige spun Kamenuki in his hands again.

“This divine weapon only seems to make things easier to pierce, but is that really all it is? And then there’s these strange attackers...”

“Judge. I calculated it out to four that tried to escape. One was that doll and two were the twin sword wielder and the sniper. Those two were the ones I was tracking. But the last one was the hammer user.”

“They seem to have escaped in the opposite direction. Was that to lose us? ...But the combination was the same as when the Secretary was attacked. One with two swords and one with a hammer.” Muneshige tilted his head. “Still, something doesn’t add up here. With that sniper fire, this is definitely a very idiosyncratic opponent. The same was true the first time. ...I want to speak with the Vice Chancellor about the strange style of sword fighting the one with the two swords used.”

“Strange style of sword fighting?”

“Judge. ...They cut from behind while facing someone.”

Muneshige opened a sign frame to view the injuries to the guards during the attack on the Secretary and he tilted his head.

“They all thought they saw someone approaching from straight ahead and then their side or back was cut from behind.”

“Can this person alter or move their wrist like I can?”

“They do seem to be doing that. But...”

Muneshige scratched at the empty air with his spear tip.

“What would you think if I said the attack came from an impossible direction?”

“Eh?”

Muneshige faced forward as Gin looked back in confusion. He looked in the direction the enemy had fled and placed the shaft of his spear on his back.

“Are you listening, Gin?”

“Judge. Go ahead.”

“First, charge toward the enemy’s side from the front and reach your hand around to their back as if embracing them.”

“Judge.”

“Then,” he said while pulling forward the spear shaft on his back. “With the blade pointed toward you, place it on the enemy’s back and pull like this to cut them.”

“That is the same movement used to draw the bow across a viola.”

“That’s right. ...In this case, the blade will reach them on the side.”

“If you embrace them and pull back, that is indeed what would happen.”

“But,” said Muneshige as he reached back and placed the base of the blade on the back of his shoulder. “Based on the depth of the wounds, it was a diagonal slash starting from the shoulder blade.”

“Then...”

“All of the victims said the same thing: When they saw the enemy’s attack right in front of them, they evaded to the front or side. The guards are all quite skilled, so they can see that much coming. But strangely...”

Gin provided Muneshige’s question for him.

“They should have avoided the attack to the side, but it followed them as a diagonal strike to the back?”

“Judge. And something else is strange about this.”

That being...

“The unavoidable strike of pursuit was actually sharper. ...What does that mean?”

As Muneshige tilted his head, his features came into view.

Light had returned to Tama. He and Gin exchanged a glance and then looked to the doll at their feet.

“The guards should be by to collect this, so once that’s done, let’s report this to the Treasurer and head home.”

“Yes. ...We have the special student general assembly tomorrow, but I am also curious about what the diplomatic groups sent to the three nations are saying via Lady Asama.”

She nimbly jumped down from the roof.

“Now, then. I bet they’re making a cheerful mess of things.”

“What!? Tenzou! This elder sister character is a busty blonde! I went out of my way to let you have her first yet you haven’t completed her route yet!? Are you saying I can have her!? ... You want me to wait!? Mary is more important, but you can’t let me have her!? Are you a monster!? Or are you taking your faith too lightly!? As divine punishment, I’ll send you a divine mail with all the ending dialogue copied into it! What? I just have to choose ‘yes’ for all the choices with that company’s games!? You fool! I’ve been stuck in an infinite loop of ‘Let’s become one → Yes → It would be a shame to do that now!’ What!? Calm down and choose ‘no’ to continue!? Surely you aren’t suggesting I choose to reject a messenger of god... What? How did I get this far with that attitude? You think I should be playing games rated ‘priests only’ instead of ‘adults only’? Hmph, the only option left is to check the divine net!”

Urquiaga-kun only gets more worked up as times goes on, thought Suzu.

It was currently eleven at night, which was the time Sasuke had mentioned. The hallway was only filled with a faint heat and the main garden only sent a damp chill toward her in the air.

...Wh-where are the guards?

They were not there. The management sign frame should have displayed a person called Rusu, but Suzu did not know if his and the guards’ absence was normal or if Sasuke had done something.

But without them there, she could not figure that out.

...I-isn’t this...a bit like cheating? Or a lot...like it?

She walked to the main garden as she thought.

Part of it was simple curiosity about the garden at night. It had been so dense during the day, so what would it be like at night?

During elementary and middle school, her class had camped out at Musashi’s underground farm district for a field trip. The air had changed at night back then. It had been an artificial arrangement, but she remembered hearing the sounds of nature.

Would this be the same?

This main garden had much more dense vegetation than Musashi’s farm district.

She walked excitedly on and took each step by the wall while trying to keep her footsteps as quiet as possible.

“Wow.”

She quickly realized this had to be amazing.

The sensory information arriving from the main garden was chilly and effervescent. It was like countless small, freshly-washed fruits were floating in the air and dripping water.

She was aware a smile had formed on her lips as she continued with a quickened pace.

“Yes.”

She entered the main garden.

Chapter 53: Lacking One in a Field of Memories

第五十三章

『記憶域の欠落者』



大事なことを
損じた結果
今の身の切れ味
配点 (思い出)

Damage

To something precious

Created my current skill

Point Allocation (Memory)

Suzu came to a new understanding of the main garden.

She could sense all the way to the far wall of the approximately hundred meter space, but that was not because there was less information than during the day.

The density had cleared out. During the day, there had been heat, smells, humidity, and more rising from the ground and wavering as they vied for her attention, but that was different now. It all rose straight up, joined together when they came into contact, and were more organized.

If the daytime air had been rough waves, then this was several skinny waterfalls rising from earth to heaven.

Those upside-down cascades rose from the entire range of the vegetation. She could reach her hand out and feel a chilly ticklishness that was not quite a smell and not quite transpiration.

...Wow.

She spread her arms to either side and grasped the flowers, plants, ground, and flowing water of this place. The air and humidity reached her skin from the cuffs and collar of the Sviet Rus summer inner suit she wore for diplomatic purposes, so she felt like she was floating in this place.

And she wondered something. If the differences between the many waterfalls were the differences between the flowers and plants...

“Are they...colors?”

There was one thing Suzu did not understand at all: colors.

She understood temperature, humidity, and wind. Thanks to touch, heat, and sound reflection rates, she could generally distinguish between the sky and clouds, water and earth, and clothing and paper. But...

...The “blue” sky...and “blue” clothing...are different.

Her senses saw a great difference between the sky and dyes, so...

...What is similar enough...to the sky, air, rain, and earth...to be used as materials for dyes and paints?

The answer was flowers and plants.

So if she used her perception of those as her basis for “colors”, could she perhaps speak about them with others and understand them herself more smoothly? So on occasion, she would visit the flower bed that Kimi had in the underground agriculture district, speak with Kimi there, and increase the material she could use to judge colors. But...

“Kimi-chan...knows a lot of...weird things...”

She would play a Gagaku song she was working on or perform a dance she was working on.

...And sometimes she lets me try the fruit wine she’s making in secret. ...Yeah.

She also knew the flower language meanings of the flowers Suzu was trying to use as a basis for colors.

For example, when Suzu was trying to decide what “red” was...

“If you use that flower for ‘red’, then red inside you will probably be ‘shy embarrassment’. Or I suppose it could also mean ‘I am perfect for you’.”

That latter option had seemed like too much, so she had chosen another. But when she had chosen a different one, Kimi had asked “Are you sure?” while sounding fairly worried. That was how she had created colors within herself, but...

...What kind of colors are there here?

She noticed some flowers with familiar colors here and there. Walking between those was a lot like walking through a chilly ankle-height current moving between the small waterfalls. So she spread her arms to better feel the slight scent and heat of flowers as she walked out into the main garden.

She did not sense anyone there. *Is that Sasuke-san and Saizou-san’s doing?* she wondered. *If so, what am I going to find here?*

She walked between flower beds, fields, and the many waterfalls and she crossed a stream. She spun around a bit on the bridge to perceive her full surroundings.

...Ah.

There were fireflies. They were glowing bugs. She could not perceive the “glow” since they produced no heat, but she knew to view their locations as “beautiful”.

“Wow...”

Those “beautiful” spots flew around her amid the many reverse cascades.

Amazing, she thought. It's a shame the others can't see this. Maybe I should go call Urquiaga-kun. But...

“Hey! Tenzou! I did what you said and it put me on a different route! And a wife!? Are you telling a Catholic like me to break one of the commandments!? What? The wife is an elder sister too! You got a problem with that!? That's right! You just need to apologize... Since you apologized for your sin, I will let you off easy and only work with Toori to flood the divine network with spoilers for your character's route.”

He sounds pretty excited, so I probably shouldn't interrupt him, decided Suzu.

Then she arrived at the main garden's central clearing. There was a large tree in the center and the “beautiful” spots flew around below it. Below the tree was something that rose to chest height on her.

...A stone?

She was skeptical because it had a snake coiled around it.

But she also thought *A snake?* because the coiled snake had horns. Or rather, it had just the one horn on one side. And so she concluded that this was neither a stone nor a snake.

As she wondered what it was, she called a name aloud.

“Masamune...-san?”

Masamune trembled when someone called her name without warning.

...Eh?

Her confusion was not just from the fact that someone had called out to her. She had been meditating in order to become one with her surroundings and calm herself. During that training, she should have been invisible. And yet...

“How?”

She could only assume it was due to her own inexperience, but she was still puzzled.

She faced forward while sitting.

“You...?”

Suzu sensed Masamune taking more definite form in front of her.

The girl stood up and faced her.

So Suzu bowed and prepared to say “It’s nice to see you again.”

But the girl spoke first.

“It’s nice to meet you. You’re...Musashi’s ambassador I assume. I’ve heard all about you. I am Date Masamune.”

...*Eh?*

Suzu did not understand why Masamune had said “it’s nice to meet you”.

After all, she had already met her during the day. She had passed out during the commotion due to the shellfire and the god of war shaped like a blue dragon, but they had definitely greeted each other and exchanged words.

...*What does this mean?*

Did she have some reason to pretend she had forgotten? But...

“_____?”

The previous snake with a strange horn had vanished at some point. Suzu did not know what that meant, but Masamune faced her and asked a question.

“Um, so was I right? Are you Musashi’s ambassador?”

She really doesn’t remember me, realized Suzu. She did not understand what this meant, but...

“Y-yes. Judge. ...I am Mukai S-Suzu.”

“So you are Mukai-dono.”

Masamune let a smile onto her lips. She also gave a sigh of relief, so she too must not have known what to do about this situation.

But for some reason, Masamune did not remember Suzu. As she wondered why, Suzu decided asking was unlikely to help. Whether it was an act or not, they had just exchanged greetings.

Confident that they now “knew each other”, she asked a question while pointing to her own shoulder.

“Was there...a snake?”

“A snake?”

Masamune looked to her shoulder while standing up, but there was nothing like that there. But then she spoke up in apparent understanding.

“Oh. That must have been my divine protection. ...Both Kojirou and I were born after the Dragon God dwelled within our mother. But if you could see that, can you see spirits?”

“No... It was the wind...and heat.”

Suzu shook her head, but she honestly gave voice to her thoughts.

“It surprised me.”

“It surprised you, did it?” Masamune sounded amused. “Mukai-dono, how about I show you around?”

“Eh? R-really?”

“The person who should handle that is unfortunately absent at the moment. Do you want to call the half-dragon that’s with you?”

Suzu glanced back toward the corridor to their rooms. She heard Urquiaga have a fulfilling time, so she slowly faced Masamune and shook her bangs back and forth.

“N-no. He sounds...serious.”

“I’m not sure what you mean, but I guess it’ll just be you.”

With that, Masamune grabbed Suzu’s hand without warning.

That was a common action, but for Suzu...

“Nn...”

She felt it was wrong and trembled at being treated differently from normal.

And it was a tremor of rejection.

Masamune realized she had acted too hastily.

A tense strength ran through the ambassador's hand.

...*Oops*.

This girl had excellent senses, but that meant being touched so suddenly only filled her with fear. So...

“Sorry.”

She quickly moved to let go, but...

“_____”

The ambassador firmly held her hand back. And with a rushed strength.

Had she felt bad for giving a reaction of rejection? She quickly shook her head.

“It's...”

Was she starting to say “it's okay”? But she stopped and simply shook her head while a rough breath swallowed the rest of her words.

Masamune wondered what to do with the tension that had taken over after the tremor. The ambassador would not allow her to let go, but...

...*In that case...*

Just as she thought that, Musashi's ambassador raised her head. She had realized something and Masamune followed by looking up overhead as well.

“Ohh.”

The tree branches up above were glowing.

It was the fireflies.

The fireflies grew in the stream and flew from there and they had gathered on the tree branches.

“It looks like the tree is blossoming.”

“...The color.”

The ambassador calmed her breathing and asked a question while looking up.

“What color is it?”

When Masamune looked again, she realized it was not white. Nor was it yellow. If anything...

“It’s a pale glow of light green.”

“Is that...the color of fireflies?”

When she replied with “testament”, the girl nodded.

She was no longer trembling and she felt no fear. She almost looked like a child after having a box of toys dumped out in front of them. But...

...What about me?

Masamune spoke while wondering that.

“Ambassador.”

“...Wh-what?”

“I’d like to show you around, so is that okay?”

The girl nodded. There was nothing there, but she looked up and tilted her head around as if viewing behind and between things.

“The colors...”

She made a request with a smile.

“Can you...tell me the colors?”

There was a night sky there.

It was a tall sky. It was clear, the two moons were out, and the moonlight dyed the white ground a pale blue.

A floor was on a level height with that ground, but it was separated from that surrounding surface. A giant warship was contained within a land port carved out inside a giant pit in the ground.

The metal ship's side said Yamagata Castle in white.

That warship was the Mogami clan's flagship and academy and each of its three hulls had sunk below the surface. However, the bridges from each floor of the land port and from the surface connected to the academy building that acted as castle tower and ship's bridge and many people and gods of war were quickly carrying supplies or equipment across.

The equipment to repair or replace armor panels, the ammunition and anti-warship spell charms, and the food and fuel stores were given priority, but...

"I take it you resupply and perform maintenance by moonlight rather than your own lights because Oushuu contains so many nonhumans, Yoshiaki."

On the Yamagata Castle's rooftop, Yoshiyasu looked down into the seeming canyon between the land port and ship. She then looked to the white land that was at nearly even level with the rooftop.

...It looks like it would be hard to send a ship out from down here, but it leaves almost no risk of being fired on from afar. And a bombing would require pinpoint accuracy.

They would have trouble with an invasion from the surface, but she doubted any land force could make it this far over that vast snowy plain.

"And..."

Yoshiyasu's gaze moved to the northwest, where the Far East's western ocean was.

It looked like a vast snowy plain, but a closer look showed the base of the hills had been carved into and several long lines led toward the ocean and occasionally rose up to a hundred or so meters tall. They covered an area of a few kilometers in each direction. An even closer look showed the risen areas were spaced out a fair bit and continued to the horizon.

Yoshiyasu tilted her head toward Yoshiaki behind her.

"Um, are those comb-like outlines cities on the surface?"

“That’s right. They dug into the slopes of the hills to create multilevel cities. The cities are divided between multilevel residential areas and valley areas for the snow to accumulate. The snow keeps out the wind, the melted snow can be used to generate power, and that water can wet the fields of the residential areas. Coexisting with the snow is Mogami’s forte.”

As she answered, Yoshiaki wore a Russian-style uniform modified into a light yellow kariginu, lay on the rooftop’s tatami mats, and snacked on some dango. She would occasionally drink sake from a bottle, but...

“Yoshiaki-sama! Your drinking pace is especially high today, so I’m worried, mon!!”

A salmon Mouse was moving back and forth in midair and making a lot of noise. Musashi’s vassal was also snacking on dango by Yoshiaki’s feet, but...

“Um, about that Mouse...”

“Oh, this is Shakenobe Hidetsuna, our Treasurer and Secretary. Come on over here.”

“Yoshiaki-sama! What is it, mon!?”

When the salmon came over, Yoshiaki grabbed it with a smile and stretched it out front to back. As a Mouse, the simplified image grew from about twenty centimeters long to thrice that size.

“See, Vassal-dono, Satomi? ...This is *Shakenobe*.”^[5]

“Ahhhn, Yoshiaki-sama! That kind of forceful introduction leaves me at an utter loss for words, mon!”

“Ho ho ho. Shakenobe, you are such a strange creature to take such joy from being bullied.”

Yoshiyasu nearly said “You’re drunk, aren’t you?”, but she held her tongue and watched Yoshiaki release Shakenobe and gently get up.

“Now... You more or less understand our general situation, don’t you?”

“If you’re suggesting we have a meeting, I believe that is scheduled for tomorrow afternoon.”

“After Musashi’s special student general assembly, you mean? Well, that’s fine, but don’t you think there are some things it would be best to know about each other before that?”

Yoshiyasu updated her judgment of this woman. She had supposedly called the two of them here so their rooms could be prepared and to keep them out of the way of the work below, but...

...She really was focused more on the three nations meeting tomorrow.

Yoshiaki had shown no sign of arranging any resupplying down below since coming to the rooftop. Either it had all been finished beforehand or each division was trained well enough to make the best decisions on their own.

That suggested a certain meaning to the dango and sake she held.

...Did she really just want to snack and drink!?

The vassal had been right to go with the flow and eat what was provided. Yoshiyasu had thought there was more to this and decided to be more cautious.

At the moment, the vassal took a teacup from the sign frame tray on Shakenobe's head.

"This is Kyou tea we received via Sviet Rus, mon!"

"Oh, so you're still trading even as you fight?"

"Did I just leak some classified information, mon!? But I won't lose, mon! The power of salmon is to give you the energy you need in the morning, mon! Natto!? I'll hear nothing of it, mon! If you want eggs, eat salmon roe, mon!"

"Oh, I get it now. Do you say 'mon' cause you're a salmon? But isn't that English?"

"But in Russian, it's semga and saying 'mga' isn't cute, mon!"

"I didn't want to say anything, but is this a wild Mouse by any chance?"

"That's right, mon! I'm wild, mon! I was born in IZUMO and, to make me more realistic, I was sent on a Come Back Salmon mission, but I got fed up with the world while swimming in the ocean and returned to nature, mon!"

"Why did you get fed up with the world?"

"U-um... How should I put it? The adults? Um, all the discipline from the adults, I guess..."

"Everyone has times when they want to act tough for no real reason," added Yoshiaki.

"Ahhhh, Yoshiaki-sama! Don't put it so bluntly, mon! A meaninglessly rebellious heart is the symbol of youth!"

Me: "Yeah, sometimes your youth displays a meaninglessly rebellious heart in the mornings. Right, Tenzou? And it's hard to restrain it. Right, Tenzou? Don't you think, Tenzou?"

10ZO: “Wh-why did you send that my way three times!? And I have Mary-dono with me, so it isn’t meaningless!”

Asama: “Um, you mean...you were facing the wall and feeling yourself for a reason...?”

Mal-Ga: “You’re the worst...”

10ZO: “Huh, huh? Wh-what is this about feeling myself? This took a weird turn.”

Scarred: “Um, Master Tenzou? The next time you feel that way in the morning, I’m willing to help.”

Almost Everyone: “Helping him feel himself...”

10ZO: “Don’t add that ‘...’! Just don’t! It gives me a bad feeling about all this!”

They like to listen in until they can use something they heard, don’t they? thought Yoshiyasu as she looked to Yoshiaki once more.

“There’s something I would like to ask about. It’s about Komahime.”

Yoshiaki reacted to that name.

A small smile remained on her lips, but she closed her eyes.

“I had a feeling you would...”

“Judge... I am not entirely ignorant of Komahime and Kojirou. They are in the same year as me, so we met during the Oushuu Festival and at other events.”

That was true.

Satomi ruled Bousou and was thus on the far east of Kantou, but that meant they held the naval route needed for Oushuu’s eastern forces to travel south from Kantou. And for western Oushuu, Satomi was in the perfect position to hold the eastern Oushuu nations in check.

Satomi had had interactions with Date and Mogami and had worked to hold them in check. But...

“Yoshiaki, I know how much you pampered Komahime. ...So please tell me. I understand that Komahime had to become Hashiba Hidetsugu’s concubine to follow the Testament descriptions for the history recreation,” said Yoshiyasu. “But why is she a ghost now? And why has Kojirou become Hashiba Hidetsugu?”

That question received a question in response. It came from the vassal who was tilting her

head.

“By Kojirou...do you mean *that* Kojirou? The Date one?”

“Yes, she means Date Kojirou.” Yoshiaki laughed quietly. “The brother of Date Masamune is now Hashiba Hidetsugu.”

What does that mean? wondered Masazumi as she tilted her head inside the tent prepared for her in the courtyard.

Tsukinowa mistook it for rubbing her cheek against it, so the Mouse pressed against her face. Masazumi responded in kind, and...

“Neshinbara, give me a history of Date Kojirou and-...”

She belatedly realized Neshinbara was not here. Earlier, Heidi had sent word that Shakespeare had begun working on removing the wall printing, but...

“It’s a pain having to look everything up myself.”

“Maa?”

I can think of it as teaching Tsukinowa, she decided with an optimistic sigh.

...I need to look up a history of Date Kojirou and his current treatment.

He was the brother of the Date clan’s leader. So why was he now Hashiba Hidetsugu, nephew of Hashiba? And why was he a ghost?

This had to be top secret. Probably on a level that prevented her father and the others from revealing it even if they knew on a personal level. And now it had suddenly come to the surface.

This is bait, realized Masazumi while smiling bitterly at Mogami Yoshiaki’s strategy here.

“Let’s hurry up and look this up, Tsukinowa. Remember that it’s about doing everything in the best way you can, not in the ‘proper’ order.”

And...

Vice President: “Satomi President, can you get any information out of Mogami Yoshiaki?”

Righteousness: “There’s one keyword that comes to mind. I’ll try asking about that.”

Masazumi prepared to say “please do”, but...

Righteousness: “You’ve already accomplished one thing, so I’ll do the same.”

Masazumi froze in place when she heard that.

...*I see.*

She had thought her earlier discussion with Yasuhira had mostly been important to Musashi, but...

“Have I given you the motivation you need, Satomi President?”

She spoke that aloud rather than via the divine transmission, so she received no reply. But everyone around her exchanged a glance and either nodded or smiled. So Masazumi smiled a little herself and said something other than “please do”.

Vice President: “It’s up to you then.”

When she saw the Musashi Vice President’s reply, Yoshiyasu thought, *Don’t leave these things to me so casually.*

But at the same time, she asked Yoshiaki a question.

“Can I ask you something? Why has the brother of Date’s leader become Hashiba Hidetsugu? And why is he a ghost? Also...”

“No one likes a child who asks too many questions.”

“And everyone hates an adult that refuses to listen.”

With that, Yoshiyasu asked a new question. It gathered together all the names that had come up recently.

“There’s a word I’ve heard several times during today’s fighting.”

It was most likely connected to all of them. The one word tied them all together.

“What is the ‘promise’? What exactly is the ‘promise’ that includes Komahime, Kojirou, and most likely Masamune and Honjou Shigenaga as well?”

Chapter 54: Late Night Diplomat

第五十四章

『夜更かし時間の外交人』



気付けば真剣に
気付けば深くに
しかし想えども
感情には走らず
配点（冷静）

I realize it has grown serious

I realize it has grown deep

But as I think back

I do not rush to emotion

Point Allocation (Calm)

“She wants to ask about the ‘promise’, does she? Satomi is taking this pretty far.”

Mitotsudaira faced Honjou Shigenaga in a red carpeted hallway.

Shigenaga roughly wore a Sviet Rus summer uniform and the bandages around her arms and neck had recovery charms woven in. The way she leaned against the wall and crossed her arms told Mitotsudaira something.

...She’s telling us she wants an unofficial conversation...

That was the point of this hallway situation. They were “passing by” in the hallway and Mitotsudaira “just so happened to overhear Shigenaga talking to herself”. So Mitotsudaira looked away from Shigenaga.

“It’s very strange... This ‘promise’ that Yoshiyasu asked Mogami about happens to have meaning here in Sviet Rus as well.”

She was pretending to speak to herself, but she had a feeling she was going too far. However, Mary had too little experience with this sort of thing and sending out Horizon would be too dangerous. Sending out the nudist would also be dangerous. Same with the crossdresser. So...

10ZO: “Judge. That shouldn’t be a problem, Mitotsudaira-dono. Keep at it like that.”

As the 1st Special Duty Officer provided Mitotsudaira with assistance, Shigenaga spoke in front of her.

“The ‘promise’. ...That was a small vow made to maintain peace in our nation and Oushuu.” Shigenaga quietly spoke into the empty air. “Let’s go over the basics. Since ancient times, the Hiraizumi long-lived and the rest of Oushuu, Sviet Rus, and Kantou have settled most of the history recreation through discussions to avoid obeying the Testament forces as much as possible. Those in the Harmonic Divine States did the same, so the discussion system only

strengthened after both sides recombined. But...”

“But in Oushuu there were nations like Mogami that still resorted to combat.”

Mitotsudaira felt she was going too far with that, but Shigenaga looked out the window and did not question it. She narrowed her eyes in the window reflection.

“Of course...there was still some conflict: between different forces within a single nation or to secure water and other resources when an expanding population required more land and more developed land. Mogami at least used that to start a few small conflicts, but why is perfectly understandable.” After all...

“After their current chancellor, Mogami Yoshiaki, Mogami will rapidly decline and end up a step away from having their land confiscated under Matsudaira’s reign.”

In other words, thought Masazumi as she stopped her search inside the tent in the diplomatic ship’s courtyard.

She straightened her bent back and used a finger to mark the entry on Hashiba Hidetsugu. She then reached for the sign frame displaying Mitotsudaira’s words and she opened her mouth to speak.

“Does Mogami want to side with us now so they can gain as much as possible before their decline?”

Background Noise: “The ‘promise’ has grown somewhat unclear, so a thought occurred to Yoshiaki.”

Mitotsudaira’s sign frame picked up Shigenaga’s words as “Background Noise”.

Background Noise: “If Mogami will eventually be ordered into decline under Matsudaira’s reign, then she needs to side with Matsudaira sooner rather than later, gain as much territory as possible, and use that land as a bargaining chip in negotiations with Matsudaira and other nations. ...This also redirects the attention of their internal forces to the outside world and the rough Mogami forces will view it as a means of attack. But this will still be supported by our discussion system.”

“Oh, I get it.”

Hori-ko: “What is it, Masazumi-sama?”

Well.

“Adele mentioned earlier that Mogami Yoshiaki was eating dango, but that must have been a way of hinting at this discussion system.”^[6]

Uqui: “Looks like we have another criminal... No, this one’s a felon...”

Asama: “Ohhh, sorry. Masazumi has trouble controlling herself when she’s working.”

Gold Mar: “Has anyone around here ever been able to control themselves?”

Vice President: “And that one doesn’t count! Tsukinowa may have picked it up, but it wasn’t my material! I firmly protest these false accusations!”

Me: “You’re making this sound complicated, but are you actually weak against this sort of thing?”

Yoshiaki watched Yoshiyasu close several sign frames while glaring at them.

Musashi must be a lively place, she thought. *But so is Mogami*, she added. Then she turned to the vassal who was finishing off the dango.

“You can have these.”

She pulled a paper bag from her sleeve and handed it to the vassal who shook it next to her ear.

“I can tell from the sound: these are karinto, aren’t they!? Such high-class sweets! Could it be...are these made from rice too?”

“That’s right. They are one of our specialties.”

They were quite sweet, so Yoshiaki expected the girl’s pace would drop.

However, her pace only picked up.

“Wow, the way they melt on your tongue is so different from wheat-based ones! The sesame in them is so good and I can’t stop eating them! Ohh, and the occasional clump is like hitting the jackpot!”

“Nooo! Yoshiaki-sama, this starving vassal intends to devour anything and everything while talking about it, mon!”

“Satomi...what kind of life does this girl live on the Musashi?”

“I’m not sure, but I know she plays with the stray dogs a lot.”

“Poor thing... Does she use pets to distract herself from her empty stomach?”

Yoshiaki placed a hand on the vassal’s shoulder.

“Eat as much as you want while you are in Mogami.”

“I don’t really understand, but thank you very much.”

“Good, good.” Yoshiaki nodded twice but then took a breath. “Komahime didn’t, but Shigenaga and that group ate quite a lot.”

“Hm? ...You know Honjou Shigenaga?”

“I said we held discussions, didn’t I?”

She produced a “ko ko” laugh from her throat as she recalled that nostalgic time. It had only been a few years before, but...

“Date, Mogami, and Sviet Rus held many discussions to face the coming age of Oushuu and Sviet Rus’s final conflict.”

And to do that...

“Do you know what kind of preparations we made?”

“Most likely,” said Mitotsudaira as she pressed her left shoulder against the hallway wall.

“The three nations made sure the generation of that age had a close relationship even as children. This is only my speculation...but Date probably sent Masamune and her brother Kojirou, Mogami probably sent Komahime, and Sviet Rus probably sent Honjou Shigenaga.”

That multinational relationship had begun from when they were quite young.

Mitotsudaira had gone through something similar. As a child, she had been sent to Musashi while carrying a portion of her nation’s fate on her shoulders.

She also recalled something from the battle with Marfa that afternoon.

...She mentioned a promise as well.

In that case, she decided while expanding her thoughts.

“Marfa and Uesugi Kagekatsu were likely part of that as well. Most likely as upperclassmen.”

Mal-Ga: “Yes... I should have drawn more upperclassmen material before we became third years.”

Smoking Girl: “Didn’t you draw so much of that that our upperclassmen were afraid of you? Like the nirvana genre.”

Mal-Ga: “One told me ‘I didn’t ascend to heaven like that!’, so I drew a new one where she started from scratch and worked her way up to the Archaic Drive that took her to the Final Nirvana. Afterwards, I got a divine mail saying, ‘Thanks to you, I’m having a great time in nirvana every day!’. Honestly...they really needed to learn the difference between reality and fiction.”

Asama: “Um, and do you think reality or fiction are more valuable?”

That’s quite a conceptual question, thought Mitotsudaira as Shigenaga suddenly turned toward her.

Shigenaga was smiling with the ends of her eyebrows somewhat raised.

“What a coincidence running into you here.”

They had passed by each other by coincidence, so they had only heard each other by coincidence. That was how they had set up this exchange of information, so Mitotsudaira nodded and asked a question with a smile.

“Judge. What a coincidence. ...Where are you headed?”

“I’m out on patrol. ...We’ve upped security after the incident this afternoon.”

“I understand. P.A. Oda and Marfa were both a lot of trouble. ...So what do you want?”

“Testament. Where are you headed?”

...What? Where am I headed?

Shigenaga was out on patrol. Mitotsudaira had known she would be by here, so she had stepped out into the hall to “happen across her”. That meant she had no real destination.

Vice President: “This is probably going to develop into a deeper discussion, so if you don’t give her an excuse, you can’t explain this if someone asks about it.”

Silver Wolf: “Um, uh? Excuse me? Why am I out here in the hall?”

Wise Sister: “Heh heh. To mark your territory, right!? Say that’s it! You’ll turn any part of any nation into your turf! Anywhere and everywhere is your turf! In this era, Hexagone Française’s palaces still don’t have bathrooms, so you could mark your territory all you wanted, right!? Tell her you were having fun using the history recreation of your native land! Tell her it’s because you’re a Nate-ive!”

Silver Wolf: “I was not doing that and I will not tell her that!!”

Still Got It: “Oh, my. Now, now, Nate. Have you forgotten all about your parents’ efforts!? I do love seeing your father’s face covered in shame, so – long story short – I’m going to record him while we watch it!”

Silver Wolf: “Mother, I prefer results over the effort that goes into achieving them, so I haven’t just forgotten; I have no idea what you are talking about. And I probably should have asked this long ago, but does my father not have any say in the matter?”

Still Got It: “You seem mistaken about something, so let me be clear: your father has plenty of say in the matter. Under my supervision. And of course, I am under his supervision.”

Gold Mar: “This may be someone else’s family, but things are getting pretty passionate!”

Asama: “Y-yes, I didn’t expect this kind of long-distance heat to reach us from an icy nation! Just like with Mary-san, I think spirit-type people must have extra warm hearts!”

Mitotsudaira was afraid she would be infected if she said anything more and she realized that it was night at the moment, so she ignored part of that and thought about the task at hand.

...Where am I supposed to be headed?

A door opened a few meters to the side and Horizon poked her head out with a bowl and chopsticks in her hands.

“Now, Mitotsudaira-sama, take these and – to use my best English vocabulary – place it ‘in’ the ‘toilet’ show some ‘guts’, ‘put’ the ‘treasure’ inside, and strike a ‘pose’.”

“Do you usually strike a pose afterwards?”

“I only ever clench my fist and shout... ‘Get!’ I sometimes receive applause from the next stall over.”

Flat Vassal: “Oh, that would be me. Celebrating other people’s success is the best way to achieve success yourself.”

Mitotsudaira noticed a look of horror on Shigenaga's face.

"M-Musashi carries around bowls and chopsticks for that...?"

"N-no! Why are you looking at us like we scare you!?"

Smoking Girl: "Does this mean your destination was the bathroom?"

"W-wait a second! I could always say I was going to the bath or to get something to drink!"

"Our bath is Far Eastern style, so it's already closed. And all we have to drink is vodka. Is that okay with you?"

Mal-Ga: "Sounds like you've only got one choice. ...That's too bad. Tell me all about it later."

Silver Wolf: "You're going to use this for a doujin, aren't you!? That's what this is for, isn't it!?"

<Scarred-sama has reconnected.>

Scarred: "Oh, sorry. I was speaking with Master Tenzou and it put my mind at ease about a number of things, so I fell asleep. Um, what is going on now?"

Gold Mar: "Judge. Mito-tsan is stubbornly refusing to go to the bathroom. You can blame the natto."

Scarred: "Eh? ...I don't really understand, but if you're afraid, I can go with you."

Silver Wolf: "Why are all of you treating me like a child now!? And is it just me or did you slip something weird into that explanation!?"

As she shouted via the divine network, the door next to her opened and the crossdresser poked his head out.

"Oh, Nate, Nate. I have a request."

"Eh? Wh-what is it?"

Finally, some help! thought Mitotsudaira as Shigenaga looked over at the crossdresser. Mitotsudaira realized Shigenaga was wrinkling her brow a little.

"Um...do you find something about our Chancellor to be strange?"

"Eh? ...This isn't...strange?"

Come to think of it, he is crossdressing. Oops. I've gotten too used to this.

Horizon commented from the side.

“This is no longer meant as a joke. It is entirely normal. ...Heh. This is the problem with entertainers.”

“D-damn you! Are you trying to provoke my entertainer's spirit!?”

“More importantly, Chancellor, what is your request?”

“Well.” The crossdresser nodded. “I'm playing a horror porn game right now, y'see. I was at the side of the canal when a voice said 'drop it and leave'. Then a crotch gravity attack hit me and black mana erupted from my crotch at Mach speed inside the marsh. Anyway, I'm too afraid to move, so can you go the bathroom for-... Why are you raising your fist? That's not what I meant. Huh? And why do you have a bowl and chopsticks, Horizon? That's not what I meant either.”

Um...

“I'm scared, so could you stay out there to protect me until the horror wears off?”

“Judge!!”

“I'm countin' on you,” said the crossdresser as Horizon handed him the bowl and chopsticks before he ducked back into his room. Mitotsudaira stood next to his door, crossed her arms, and looked to Shigenaga.

“We won this time!”

“S-sure...”

Mitotsudaira was worried about the way Shigenaga hung her head, but she took a breath all the same.

“Now, then. ...I think it's time I gathered my thoughts. Yes, I have a habit of speaking to myself, so I can't help it if I say some of it out loud.”

She knew what she had to think about now: the questions they had come across thus far.

“Why did Date Kojiro become Hashiba Hidetsugu and why are both he and Komahime ghosts? And what is their 'promise'?”

Vice President: “Wait!!”

...Eh?

Silver Wolf: “What is it, Masazumi? Do you have another lame joke to tell? Did what I said trigger this?”

Vice President: “You people are too harsh lately!! ...Anyway, listen up, Mitotsudaira and Satomi President. I want you to ask Honjou and Mogami something.”

Righteousness: “Ask them what?”

After a short pause, Masazumi’s words arrived.

Mitotsudaira moved her lips to confirm the question written out in text.

“How long were Date Kojirou and Komahime...still alive?”

She ended up copying Masazumi’s tone of voice, but she also saw a change in Shigenaga’s face as she leaned against the wall with her arms crossed.

Her eyes widened but finally relaxed and then her eyebrows rose in a smile.

...Eh?

Mitotsudaira heard Shigenaga’s laughter. Shigenaga hid half her face behind a hand, so only her shaking shoulders were visible.

“It seems someone there has figured out most of what is happening in Oushuu and Sviet Rus and what the current situation is. So you’ve finally seen the truth, you rulers of empty promises.”

Shigenaga raised her head, re-crossed her arms, and spoke with her eyebrows still raised.

“I’ll start with Date Kojirou. He died two weeks ago. And...”

And...

“He was killed by his own sister, Masamune.”

“By his own sister...?”

Adele had a decent grasp of history. She learned some in class and learned some more on the divine radio and divine television. Her knowledge of the Date clan came from a preliminary information show on the divine television.

...According to that, the Date clan carried out the history recreation by having their oldest daughter inherit Masamune's name and their second-oldest son inherit Kojirou's name...

There had been a lot more information shows on Date, Mogami, and Sviet Rus ever since they had arrived at the Ariake. According to an afternoon gossip show called Disastrous You...

"This information is unconfirmed, but I've heard that the Date clan's former delinquent of an oldest son punished their second son who wasn't doing any work and this had a profound effect on their mother who was very fond of the second son. Is that true?"

The question was directed toward Yoshiaki who thought for a moment and then nodded.

"Well, I don't know if this leaked out or if it's just a coincidence, but...it is true that happened. After all, Masamune killing Kojirou is mentioned in the Date clan's Testament descriptions."

"Judge. ...I saw it on the divine TV."

According to the Testament descriptions, Date Masamune, who would become ruler of Oushuu, had a single younger brother.

He grew attached to Masamune and they were good brothers to each other, but the mother doted on the younger brother.

...Masamune's relationship with his mother grew cold due to his decisive personality and due to losing an eye to illness, but I think he decided to kill Kojirou because that mother was plotting to make the second son into head of the clan.

It was said a certain battle dealt a decisive blow to the quarrel between mother and son. In that battle, Masamune's father was taken hostage, but Masamune focused on protecting the Date clan and left his father to die.

For the history recreation, there had been much discussion about how to handle that before Masamune was even born, but before any of that could happen, Masamune's mother had needed to give birth to Masamune who would become known as the One-Eyed Dragon.

...So Masamune's mother, Yoshihime-san, went out to pray for a good marriage.

She had gone out in a hurry at night, so instead of the marriage shrine, she had accidentally visited the Dragon God's shrine where people prayed for victory. The next day, she had frantically prayed, "Cancel! God, cancel my prayer from last night!", but due to her excellent compatibility with spirits, she had ended up marrying the Dragon God.

“It was a bit like having a fatherless child, but I believe moving and sealing up the Dragon God’s shrine acted as an interpretation of letting Masamune’s father die.”

“That’s right,” said Yoshiaki. “I can imagine how panicked she must have been... Yoshihime was always a friend of mine and like a little sister to me, but she could never get over her carelessness.”

Yoshiaki laughed quietly, but her expression suddenly sank. The ends of her eyebrows and the corners of her eyes lowered and only her mouth retained a bit of a smile.

“Things were so much fun back then. But now my Komahime has also-...”

“Don’t say it,” said the Satomi President.

Adele looked up and saw the girl standing with the moons in the background. Yoshiyasu spoke below the two moons that could approach but never touch.

“What are you planning to blame by saying that now, Yoshiaki?”

“Then will you say it for me, Satomi?”

The Satomi President’s mouth twisted and Adele thought she heard the girl clench her teeth.

...*Oh*.

Adele suddenly realized the two were being considerate of each other.

She wondered what to do as she munched on a karinto. It was sweet, so she spoke the truth in her heart before the other two could.

“Komahime-san...passed away at the same time, didn’t she?”

Yoshiaki and the Satomi President looked over at her in surprise, but Adele lowered her head a little while aware she had a bitter smile on her lips.

“Sorry. But...this is Musashi’s problem too. After all...”

As she said that, a sign frame arrived via Asama. It was a summary Masazumi had made from divine network information and it was a patchwork of the scraps of data Tsukinowa had desperately gathered.

The sizes were mismatched, but the data was laid out with a focus on readability and it told Adele that what she had realized was the truth.

She opened her mouth and looked to Yoshiaki. She knew what she had to say.

“Kojirou-san and Komahime-san’s fate has to do with Musashi, doesn’t it? If it happened two weeks ago, that means...”

That means...

“Hashiba requested it when the Musashi arrived in the Ariake after our loss, right? They asked you to confirm the history recreation to show whether you intended to obey them or not.”

“_____”

Masazumi placed a hand on Tsukinowa who sat on her shoulder and she collapsed backwards.

She was glad this was inside a tent. There was nothing she could do about these difficult matters, but she sometimes wanted to let her frustrations show to reduce some of the stress. However, the sign frame was fixed to the location of her gaze, so it moved with the tilting of her body.

And she saw some words there.

Mal-Ga: “What the hell? ...That’s like a direct challenge to our policy. They’re telling people to die for history.”

“Ga-chan.”

She heard a voice from another tent behind her. And finally...

“Yeah.” Naruze agreed using her voice rather than the text. “I know that, but Hashiba’s way of doing the history recreation still pisses me off.”

“Yeah,” agreed Masazumi while lying down. She placed Tsukinowa more on her forehead than her head and placed a finger on her throat to pick up her voice.

There was something she understood as a politician. Hashiba’s request was kind in a way, but it was also cruel in a way.

...I wonder how Hashiba felt about doing that?

She first thought of a question that went beyond the conclusion. If she did not do that, she felt she would forget all about the conclusion.

She carved that into her mind to ensure she did not forget and then she spoke.

Vice President: “I oh Ahiba ehested...pey, pey, pey, Tsukinowa, ut are oo oeing?”

Wise Sister: “You’ve turned into an idiot girl again, haven’t you!? I don’t know why you switch over every so often, but it’s oh so lovely! Is there something wrong with you!?”

Asama: “Ohh, if a Mouse isn’t used to it, this tends to happen when you have it read your vocal cords in an unusual position. I’ll change the settings a little from here.”

<Prayer Change: Mouse Tsukinowa Settings: Reading Flexibility → High: Confirmed>

Vice President: “Is this better?”

It seemed so, so Masazumi patted Tsukinowa and spoke.

Vice President: “I know Hashiba requested a sign of obedience from Date and Mogami, but I believe I know what exactly was requested of them.”

First...

Vice President: “Mogami would have been told to send Komahime over as Hashiba Hidetsugu’s concubine in accordance with the history recreation.”

And second...

Vice President: “Date would have been told to confirm Masamune’s position as head of the clan in accordance with the history recreation. But Hashiba probably made another request. ...Since Date Kojirou was to die in the history recreation anyway, they wanted him handed over as Hashiba Hidetsugu.”

Hori-ko: “They forced him to live on as a ghost?”

10ZO: “No, it wouldn’t have been that simple. After all...”

Crossunite spoke up to assist Masazumi.

10ZO: “Hashiba Hidetsugu-dono did not get along with Hashiba, so Hashiba orders him and Komahime-dono to commit suicide.”

Scarred: “Master Tenzou. Then...”

“Judge,” posted Crossunite, but he said no more than that.

The silence brought by his lack of further comment meant it was Masazumi’s turn to speak as a politician, so she got up and breathed in.

Vice President: “Hidetsugu faces inevitable death by the history recreation, so I’m betting Kojirou was recommended for the role as he was already doomed to die in the Date clan. In Hashiba’s own way, it may have been a method of minimizing the number of deaths.”

As for Komahime’s death, she may have committed suicide in advance when she received a request that ensured her death later. *We need to look into the details there and give it more thought*, decided Masazumi.

“...?”

Then she heard a sound.

It reminded her of splashing water. And as that low rumbling reached her...

Smoking Girl: “The ship is moving!?”

Masazumi could sense exactly what Naomasa had suggested. The torch spell charms hanging from the tent’s ceiling were swaying and everything seemed to be spinning below her butt.

“Wah!”

The ship was turning to the right, so it was likely moving to face north. And as soon as she rolled toward the tent’s entrance...

“Come here, politician. You’ll see something interesting.”

It was the Aoi Sister. The floor was still turning at high speed, but as the girl opened the tent entrance and reached out a hand, she easily kept a rhythm with her waist and grabbed Masazumi’s hand.

It seemed strange because all the girl had done was pull Masazumi to her feet.

...But what is that step she’s doing?

The Aoi Sister seemed to be dancing as she guided Masazumi outside. As Masazumi looked around, torches illuminated the turning ship and people (mostly students) ran here and there.

Then Masazumi heard a rumbling passing through the sky from south to north.

She could not see the source of the noise, but something else showed what it was: lightning.

Twin bolts of lightning struck on the left and right at set intervals, showing its path.

“Is that what I think it is?”

“Yeah, it’s the god of war we saw today,” said Naomasa as she walked out from a tent in her pajamas. “It’s most likely the Seiryu of the Four Sacred Beasts.”

The ship’s turn came to a sudden stop, so Asama tripped just as she left her tent and ended up wrapped up in the tent like a spring roll.

...It’s been a while since I saw the spring roll joke.

“W-wait, I’m completely trapped in here! Please help me.”

“Heh heh heh. Later, later! The crime of destroying Moon Goddess Diane Aoi’s home for the busty is as heavy as two giant breasts! Um, that means you take two π s^[7] and multiply them by the diameter...”

“I don’t know what you’re trying to do there, but I think you have the equation a little wrong, Aoi Sister.”

At any rate, the Aoi Sister only had to pull gently on Masazumi’s hand to prevent the ship’s shaking from affecting her.

It may have been a dancer’s spell. Regardless, Masazumi’s steady eyes could see the scene in the night sky. An especially large flash of lightning lit up the northern sky of Date.

...What is that...?

Naomasa clicked her tongue and answered Masazumi’s unspoken question.

“I’ve heard that the sky was stormy for a while after we arrived at the Ariake. There were early summer thunder clouds and lightning would sometimes strike at night.”

But...

“What is that? That isn’t a thunder cloud at all! It’s the Seiryu of the Four Divine Beasts gods of war! ...Why does that appear behind Masamune and Kojirou who’s now Hidetsugu!? And now...”

Color scattered through the distant sky. They were explosions of light and there were three in all.

...Is that Date’s aerial unit!?

They were fighting a battle and Naruze commented on that fact as she left one of the tents.

“Those explosions are from reactive spell armor. They probably intend to start with a close-range attack and switch to a long-range attack after forcing it to a stop. Otherwise, they couldn’t react to the enemy’s speed and would get taken out.”

But...

“What is this? The Seiryu was appearing behind Hidetsugu and Masamune, so why is it on a rampage and fighting the Date clan?”

Date Narumi realized the situation was even worse than expected.

...The Seiryu is growing even stronger?

When the report had reached her in her bedroom that doubled as a living room, she had been at a loss as to what to wear at the ball being held before the next day’s meeting. She had lined up clothing all across her room, she had fallen to her knees, and she had been holding a mental survey as to what she should curse for this, but the blaring alarm had blasted all that from her mind.

“A flying object is rapidly approaching southern Date territory from western Mito, hm?”

Oniniwa and the rest of the aerial god of war unit were leaving in gods of war equipped with reactive spell armor so in order to be simultaneously light-weight and heavily-armored, but she had no time to see them off. Changing clothes would have been a pain, so she ran down the alarm-filled corridor in just her inner suit shirt.

She knew exactly where she had to go.

...The main garden.

As she ran, the alarm sounded and an announcement played over it.

“2-1, 3-2, and 3-3 of the Oniniwa Battalion’s vanguard have been too badly damaged to continue the fight! Add three more requests for recovery units! The target’s output has increased by 37% and its thrust has increased by 21% compared to last time!! Middle defense unit, prepare the anti-air cannons with lightning reduction spell rounds! Everyone, please provide A-class effort!”

“If that’s Oniniwa-san’s decision, then this seemingly exaggerated response must be appropriate...”

But the estimated increases in output and thrust were awful. Oniniwa had fought at an even

level during their previous clash, so if this was based on the data from then, it would have far surpassed him.

...Did today's appearance strengthen the right of ownership again?

She did not know the answer, but...

“Rusu-san, are you there?”

“Testament. What is it?”

“What is the status of the Seiryu's appearance?”

A sign frame appeared to answer her question, but it must not have been set to correct its position to her running. She instantly left it five meters behind her, so it vanished and a new one appeared nearby. This one stayed with her and it displayed an elderly figure with gray hair.

“The Seiryu appeared in the sky above western Mito. That position was...well, to put it simply, it was between the two of them. But...”

“It's shifted more toward the other end, you mean?”

“Testament. The right of ownership is shifting. So...”

“You don't have to say it. I'm on my way there.”

Narumi faced forward as she ran and spread her arms to the sides.

“Unturning Centipede, only reinforce my limbs.”

<Summon: Limbs Reinforcement: Confirmed>

The air split and the wind blew out as if a lid had been removed from the space behind her. Only the dark green and vermilion arms and legs of Unturning Centipede appeared.

“Link.”

Once they fit into place, her head nearly reached the ceiling and each step naturally took her further, but...

“General Affairs Committee, I need to reach the main garden ASAP, so give me the shortest route.”

“Head straight down in three...four and a half steps! You won't have to pass through the

conduction system there!”

“Testament. Thanks.”

With that, Narumi took a step and reached a hand into the empty space behind her.

With her second step, she pulled a centipede mandible sword from the air.

With her third step, she twisted her body, took a stronger than normal fourth step that sounded loudly on the floor, and added an extra half step. She lowered her back leg’s knee and stabbed the mandible sword deep into the floor.

“Now, then.”

She instantly re-summoned the sword and hands thirty or so times. The stabbing blade vibrated like a saw and her surroundings spun around. Solid noises and sparks burst out and the rapidly vibrating blade drew a circle on the floor.

A moment later, Narumi dropped down a story along with the hole she had cut in the stone floor.

But she saw a certain color in the instant she fell.

...This is...

It was a blue light. It was ether light. It could also be called the light of rapid lightning strikes.

“The main garden!!”

Again and again, that lightning swept across a space that should have been filled with darkness.

Chapter 55: Stopper in a Blue Place

第五十五章

『青き場の制止者』

止めに行けるか
配点 (意地)

Will I go to stop it?

Point Allocation (Willpower)

Suzu stood in front of a power.

...Eh!?

It had all begun without warning.

Until then, Masamune had been showing her around the main garden. Masamune had pulled on her hand with a faint tension in her grasp as she told Suzu the colors of the flowers and why certain trees had been planted.

The main garden had apparently been made by Masamune's mother and it had been made to recreate the summer in Mogami, her mother's homeland. She had very slowly told Suzu all of that as if thinking back on all her memories.

"With a name like Mogami, they seem really full of themselves to me."^[8]

Despite what she said, Masamune sounded almost fond of them. Suzu guessed she loved her mother, but...

"I used to play with my brother and our friends here."

A hint of regret entered her voice when she said that, so...

"What about...Narumi...-san and...the others?"

Masamune gripped Suzu's hand a little tighter at that.

"We're not making this easy for Narumi."

"Not making this...easy?"

"According to the Testament descriptions, Narumi has to leave the Date clan for a long period of time."

"Leave?"

I can't just keep asking questions, she told herself, but Masazumi had told her it was important to show no shame about asking about anything she did not know. *Does that mean*

Urquiaga-kun is being diplomatic when he shows no shame in loudly asking Tenzou-kun and the others about how to complete different routes? Maybe not. And he did seem to be making a threat earlier.

Regardless, Masamune pulled on her hand and answered.

“The Testament descriptions give a number of reasons in the footnotes, but Narumi herself says she wants to see the outside world to establish a foundation for the later Date clan’s rule.”

“Is that...so?”

“Testament. She’s trained for a long time to inherit that name, so she’s spent all her time on training and has never left Oushuu. And she’s already a third year. She can continue on as a student on the Sibir side of things, but if she’s going to act as Date Narumi, the Far Eastern commander, she needs to leave Date this year.”

You saw it, didn’t you?

“Her clothes and such are all things she’s ordered from K.P.A. Italia for her long trip away or that everyone else has sent her.”

“Is that...why?”

Narumi had not known how to hold down her skirt and this explained why she was so unaccustomed to wearing one.

But Suzu felt a little happy. Date’s Vice Chancellor was a skilled combat-type, but...

...She’s like...me.

When Suzu had been given her role as ambassador, she had been hesitant while also thinking it would be fun. And the reactions from Toori, Kimi, Asama, and the others when they saw her in her diplomatic outfit had been enough on its own to make the whole thing worthwhile.

Date’s Vice Chancellor was probably hoping for something that similarly made it all worthwhile.

“That’s...right...”

Masamune had to understand as well. Not allowing Narumi to leave would not reward her for patiently waiting for so long. But...

“Narumi-san...v-visited the Ariake...last night...didn’t she?”

Masamune's eyes widened a little and she looked up.

"Did that happen? ...Well, it was probably a top secret mission."

She did not remember. Or had she never known? Suzu could not tell, but there was a smile on Masamune's lips.

"But if she was allowed out, Rusu-san or Katakura must have determined it was okay. I think it's a good thing."

Her grip on Suzu's hand relaxed a little, which put Suzu at ease. Suzu squeezed the girl's hand and she squeezed back.

They were telling each other everything was okay. But...

...Why doesn't Masamune-san have her memories anymore? And...

Why could they not let Narumi leave?

...Is it because of what happened...during the day?

Was it related to that draconic god of war with explosive levels of power?

"...?"

Suzu suddenly felt that *something was not right*. Something had suddenly gone wrong.

After all, all strength vanished from Masamune's hand.

"Masa...mu...ne-san!!"

Just as Suzu thought about turning back, a power that seemed to blow everything away appeared behind Masamune as she fell to her knees.

Narumi was pushed back by a sudden pressure in the main garden.

The explosive pressure was both wind and sound. It was also an ether-warping strength, a light, and...

...Heat!?

It was not hot. It was even refreshingly cool. But each time the low wave of heat washed across her machine's metal skin...

“It’s pushing me back!?”

Narumi had jumped down into the main garden from a corridor, but this explosive ether pressure had immediately struck her.

It was powerful and she had trouble moving forward even after she hurriedly righted herself. She slowly but surely gained ground and moved to the space between the entrance and the center of the main garden, but...

...I can’t go any further!?

She could see it in the center. Masamune had fallen to her knees on the bridge crossing a stream. She was hanging her head, her arms hung limply at her sides, and something appeared near her back.

“The Seiryu’s gate!!”

A bluish-white air current leaked from a fissure there. Like a pulse, like a physical blow, or like something was trying to break through from the other side, the air current creating the great pressure would occasionally geyser out.

Narumi knew the Seiryu lurked beyond that gate.

The Seiryu was the god of war sealed inside the dual pitch space given to Masamune.

It was currently appearing in an out-of-control state, so Oniniwa and the others were battling it. Meanwhile, the gate that allowed its appearance was trying to open on its own.

While they drove back the Seiryu that had appeared outside, calmed it down, and got it to retreat back into the dual pitch space, they also had to seal and close up the Seiryu’s gate that appeared behind Masamune.

If they failed to do both, the Seiryu would appear behind Masamune in its out-of-control state.

That was why the Seiryu had suddenly appeared behind her during the day.

They had to avoid that. If it happened now...

...The rampaging Seiryu will appear inside Sendai Castle!

That would mean more than just the destruction of Sendai Castle from within. The Musashi diplomats and the personnel inside would be in danger. But...

“_____!!”

A noise reached Narumi's ears. The eruption of blue pressure sounded like a roar.

The powerful wind and roar shook her body as she continued forward. She repeatedly and rapidly re-summoned Unturning Centipede's legs and took a definite step forward.

On the other side, she saw members of the Chancellor's Officers rushing out from the corridor leading to the HQ.

"Vice Chancellor! Are you okay!?"

"I'd stay back if I were you! You'll be blown away!"

She did not have time to brush back her hair as it danced in the wind. Holding a mandible sword forward to slice apart the pressure was the most she could manage at the moment. But the others...

"What, is this all!? This isn't enough to stop the warriors of Oush- gwaaah!"

"Ahh, are you okay!? Okay, that just means I have to break through for the both of- gwaaah!"

"What are you two doing? And when the Vice Chancellor rushed in so quickly she's only wearing a shir- kyaaah!"

Are they unable to learn? wondered Narumi in a fairly harsh assessment of her fellow warriors. Then she noticed someone fallen onto their butt in the stream behind where Masamune had fallen to her knees on the bridge.

It was Musashi's ambassador.

Narumi had no idea what that girl was doing there, but she was directly below the air current gate that had appeared behind Masamune.

And as soon as Narumi realized how dangerous that spot was, the Seiryu's gate spilt down the center and the pressure grew.

"It's getting even more powerful!?"

Narumi felt herself slipping backwards.

Her legs were strengthened by Unturning Centipede, so they had not given into the pressure. Instead, the wind pressure was pushing her entire body back.

...Oh, no!

It was more like a powerful current than a gust of wind.

The thick water pushed her body back like a massive surge of water pressing against her all at once. The dragon's roar rang loudly beyond the gate in the distance.

...Not good!

Musashi's ambassador seemed to have come to after falling onto her butt in the stream. She shook her head back and forth to perceive her position down in the shallow stream. But the air current gate above her head was changing form.

The gate came apart and the current of pressure began spilling out and spreading even further.

Musashi's ambassador noticed this and looked up toward the pressure that had to be building up and pressing down on her, but...

“_____!”

Narumi heard a shout. Or she thought she did. And that shout had said...

...Masamune...-san?

Musashi's ambassador was calling to her. That was how it sounded to Narumi.

Even in this situation, Musashi's ambassador was more worried about the head of the Date clan than about herself. That told Narumi something as the Vice Chancellor.

“I had no choice but to come here.”

Masamune was like a little sister to Narumi. Their positions in Date were different and she was Chancellor while Narumi was Vice Chancellor, but Narumi had given her a lot of advice in the past and had managed her training. So she could not abandon her. Thus...

“Forward!”

Narumi thrust her mandible sword out ahead.

She broke through the pressure to reach Masamune and Musashi's ambassador as quickly as she could.

But the dragon easily foiled her plan. The noise it produced was no longer a roar and seemed like an infinite amount of sound.

...It's melting?

The dirt below her feet burst up like ocean spray. The ground sank down below her feet and her feet reached the gravel crust below, but even that gravel trembled and flowed.

“Kh...!”

Unturning Centipede sank down into the earth up to the ankles.

The surrounding flower beds and water were all blasted into the air where the waves of ether washed it away.

A mist formed, but that was likely due to the stream’s water scattering from the vibration. Meanwhile, Narumi was slowly pushed backwards.

The ground below her feet vibrated, shook, and flowed, so she could not hold her ground. Planting her feet more firmly would only cause her to sink down. She tried to move forward nonetheless, but...

“There’s more coming!?”

New pressure arrived. It became a great wave of light and it came all at once.

The air current gate was trying to open up as if it were being torn apart.

Meanwhile, Narumi was carried backwards along with the mandible sword she hurriedly tried to hold at the ready.

As she was blown back, she had to wonder what was happening to Oniniwa as he fought the Seiryu outside.

Several leaf veins of light ran through the night sky.

They were lightning strikes.

The moons were out and the sky was full of moonlight, but bluish-white lightning struck in every direction. The blasts of light did not all start from a single point; they ran in every direction within the vast space and the intense light was constantly approaching one strip of the sky.

The lightning airspace covered several kilometers and it contained a dragon-like yet upright god of war known as the Seiryu, and...

“Ohhh!”

Sagetsu, Oniniwa's god of war, was also there.

Seven Date gods of war with rifles surrounded those two from a distance.

“Attack!”

The rifles were meant for long-range use and they began firing within the lightning airspace. Each of them targeted the Seiryu and fired from every direction while just barely within the effective range.

Several sign frames predicting lightning strikes appeared in rows to draw out the paths of lightning in advance. The blue lightning shattered the sign frames almost immediately, but the seven gods of war managed to dodge. A few of them would occasionally cast a degaussing spell on the lightning attacks, so ether light burst from their entire bodies.

As they dodged the lightning, they fired constantly.

First, three of them repeatedly fired spell matchlocks with auto-loading mechanisms and with homing divine protections on the bullets. After using up their thirty-round magazines by firing one at a time, the spell gunpowder built up in the back of the barrel and overheating rendered the barrel useless.

So they got rid of it.

For the time it took them to attach a new barrel, the other four would fire.

The overlapping sounds of gunfire defied the roar of thunder.

After flying a few kilometers, the rapid-fire homing bullets would grow a tail of fog, but the homing divine protection would kick in the instant they arrived within a kilometer of the Seiryu. Hundreds of bullets blossomed around the Seiryu like a storm of blowing cherry blossoms and pursued it from every direction.

Some of their trajectories were gentle, some moved toward the flying target like a nail, and some shot sharply in along a shallow arc.

The Seiryu moved quickly and generally tried to shake them from its tail.

The dragon seemed to swing around the lightning airspace surrounding it as it took large but calm movements to break free of the pursuing homing lights. It did not open its wings all the way and the homing light trailed behind it like hair.

They could not reach it.

As they were swung around by the Seiryu's evasive maneuvers, a few of the bullets collided

with each other and detonated. The explosion pierced the surrounding group of pursuers and more were shot down by the lightning strikes.

“_____”

The storm of blowing cherry blossoms expanded in flames.

A chain of explosions combined into a single muffled noise and a shockwave warped the sky.

The group of homing bullets was instantly lost, but...

“Ohhhh!!”

A great form clashed with the Seiryu.

It was Sagetsu. Date's 2nd Special Duty Officer crossed paths with the Seiryu with a giant sword in hand.

Oniniwa wished to clash with the Seiryu.

Sagetsu, the god of war he had inherited from his father, was constantly emitting shimmering heat from the overheated shoulders and the wings on its back were beginning to create a similar wavering in the air.

But he could not stop this confrontation. After all, as the Seiryu flew through the night sky with its lightning strikes, it was steadily approaching Sendai Castle.

...I must not give the skies of Sendai to this god of war!

Sendai Sibir's central region was covered by a Harmonic Territory and it was beginning to enter its short summer period. The snow was melting and the rich flow of water could be heard even at night in Sendai Castle's castle town and the other towns and villages. The people could sleep while expecting to go outside the following day rather than being trapped inside by snow as they were during the winter.

Oniniwa was the 2nd Special Duty Officer. In his work on the Public Morals Committee, he would go around Date to visit the different magistrates and provide political guidance, so he knew well how people lived during this season.

He could not allow the crazed dragon's roar to disturb the people's sleep as they looked forward to summer.

“You must be pacified!”

As he received covering fire, Oniniwa made attack after attack without rest and shouted to the roaring dragon.

“You absolutely must be pacified!!”

He made a splendid sword strike, showed no fear of the attack coming from directly ahead, swung his body to the left and right, spun his power around, and pierced with it.

...Be pacified!!

Oniniwa sensed that the Seiryu was “consuming” their leader Masamune.

Ever since the Seiryu had appeared, Masamune spent more time asleep each day and her strength was fading. She was losing weight and moving between her room and the main garden was the most she could manage.

Placing her on the diplomatic aircraft carrier and taking her outside had likely put too much of a burden on her. The specific events of the day would also have played a role. A fair bit of the Seiryu’s right of ownership would have been taken away then.

According to Rusu, the Seiryu was “possessing” Masamune. It could no longer control the power of its own presence inside the dual pitch space that it was meant to provide on its own, so it was placing a burden on Masamune.

“But you’re supposed to belong to Masamune!!”

He had to hurry. If he did not quickly pacify the Seiryu and bring back Masamune...

...Date will be in a precarious position given the world’s recent movements.

“Ohhh!”

His repeated attacks did not reach their target.

This was due to the ether. The ether being transformed into lightning was wrapped around the Seiryu and turning its body into an intense current.

His attacks were caught in that current and some were even taken away.

Each of the Four Sacred Beasts gods of war had one of the Mountain-River-Path-Swamp powers. The Seiryu’s was the River.

The power controlled intense currents and the thunder clouds that poured water into the water sources.

This was a dragon technique.

And it did not allow an Oni like Oniniwa or his god of war's power or techniques to approach.

“_____”

A strike from the right was deflected.

Was the scattering light roasted metal fragments or lightning fragments? He sensed creaking metal with his entire body and not just his ears as the frame bounced back from the blow.

A wave ran through all of the god of war's components and an intense vibration knocked the metal body downwards as if it were sinking.

Sagetsu was blasted downwards toward the ground.

And within the lightning and the glowing and rushing ether, Oniniwa looked up toward the sky and saw the Seiryu there.

...Here it comes!

It was the River. Inside the lightning airspace, dark clouds and an intense downward current of light were recreated with ether light. Just as Tres España's Michiyuki Byakko had created a path in empty air and just as Musashi's Jizuri Suzaku had summoned an infinite lake as acceleration space, the Seiryu created a current of lightning around itself.

It had definite power. It was no longer rain that filled that space.

...It's a downpour of lightning!

Several points of light were visible in the sky. It was similar to what the Seiryu had done in the mountains of Date's southern territory, but the quantity was far greater. The points of light almost completely filled a square area of sky several kilometers across.

“Is it coming?”

Just as he thought the lights of the sky were blurring together, the vertical lightning strikes became a downpour of rain and fell across the entire region.

“Oh, not bad.”

The light far in the eastern sky was visible from Yamagata Castle's rooftop.

Yoshiyasu saw Yoshiaki's eyes sharpen, so she looked in the same direction.

“Is that the Seiryu's power?”

“Yes, although it has kicked into overdrive because they've completely lost control of it.”

“Judge,” said the vassal as she folded up the bag of karinto. “So it's like one of those RPG characters that can use a really powerful move but gets weakened when they join your party?”

“Well, based on what Yoshiaki said before, it is wearing away at Masamune's life...”

“Ko ko,” laughed Yoshiaki. “Of course, even this major attack still possessed the basic traits of lightning. Oniniwa has already experienced this, so I'm sure he has put together a countermeasure. And Date's Katakura will be supporting him as he fights.”

Thus...

“So however this turns out, Oniniwa is the one doing ‘not bad’ for the moment. ...Just watch.”

“I think I understand.”

Yoshiyasu narrowed her eyes and watched the lights in the distant sky.

Just as the airspace seemed dyed in the colors of lightning, they were dyed in another color and they split apart.

“That was a forceful resolution. So the moon that looks up to the Oni took a twisted left-facing stance.^[9] Of course, he seems to be saying this is no more than a single step in his means to resolve this. After all...”

Red, the color of explosive flames, could be seen in the distant sky.

“After all, the sounds of the clash have yet to fade.”

Just as the downpour of lightning began, Oniniwa was sprawled out and falling, but he did not take any evasive actions.

He simply watched the bright lightning approaching from heaven and checked the surface with his rear sight devices.

“Excellent aim!”

The lights of Sendai in central Date were already visible to the north, but they were on the edge of a vast Harmonic Territory's atmospheric barrier. Seven lines of light stretched toward him from the anti-air battery there.

This was spell sniping using anti-air cannons, but they were using physical shells. As soon as the seven shots arrived directly below him, the warhead cylinders burst and the charm bullets inside launched the real spell vertically.

Seven spell sign frames seemed to burst up from the bottom of the intense ether current.

And as a result...

<Activating: Forced Ether Transformation: High Pressure: Explosion: Confirmed>

In the instant the Seiryu created its River, high pressure interference was applied to the ether composing that space in order to transform it into something other than the lightning it was meant to become.

And for now, they did something else to oppose the blue ether and bluish-white lightning.

“Explode!!”

A moment later, Oniniwa's Sagetsu and the other seven gods of war used spells to open anti-explosion barriers around themselves. Then the downpour of lightning reached them from the sky.

The River space expanded the seven explosions within it and the red flames instantaneously raced through the ether.

“Take that!!”

The sky was decorated by a several kilometer explosion and lightning strike.

The space contained nothing but destruction.

The scorched air ignited everything, the vacuum created by the burning sliced through everything, and the lightning that seemed to weave through the gaps scratched at the air like an act of rage more than a downpour.

Sounds of burning and blowing mixed together as the wind and pressure collided as if the world's directions had been swapped around.

But Oniniwa and the others had not escaped that airspace. They instantly activated light-

blocking spells to protect their sight devices from burning out and they faced forward.

“The Seiryu...!”

The Seiryu’s entire body was wavering. The explosion had disturbed the ether light enveloping it as a fierce current.

If they were going to attack, now was the time.

This opportunity had reached them because they had chosen not to escape even if it meant being destroyed by their own attack.

“Let’s go!!”

The explosive blast passed them by and Oniniwa ascended from directly below the Seiryu. On that cue, the seven other gods of war made their charge. They had all thrown away their rifles earlier to protect them from the previous explosion, so their only weapons were large anti-god of war swords.

But as they flew in, the Seiryu made a forceful counterattack. Even as it was shaken by the explosion, it swung its arms and fired lightning from them. While standing upright, it fired seven blasts at the seven enemies.

An instant later, the seven blasts tore through the atmosphere and the night as they each split into dozens of lighting pillars which took both weaving and straight paths toward the seven gods of war. The seven gods of war activated spells in their hands as they flew. They sent out the sign frames that predicted the paths of the lightning, but it was too late.

The sign frames were overtaken by the racing lightning pillars.

The lightning strikes moved quickly and split even further as they surpassed and confused the spell prediction. The sign frames were unsure which lightning to predict, so they began to spin around and then were shattered by the lightning.

That just left the seven gods of war to charge right into the lightning.

The lightning did not fly directly at them, but its sheer quantity and speed made a counterattack from all directions.

It happened in an instant. As Oniniwa ascended from directly below the Seiryu, he gave a shout while raising the power of his wings.

“Katakuraaaaaa!!”

Immediately afterwards, a staticky but definite sign frame appeared behind the seven gods of

war. It displayed a fuzzy and distorted image of someone.

“Oh, I’m just not sure whether I should thank you or complain that you disturbed the airspace here! Vice President Katakura Kagetsuna-kun speaking! I hope you’ll cry tears of joy that I brought you under my command in such high spirits! Are any of you girls!? No!? Then screw it! I don’t have to worry about what you think of me, so just follow me!”

Katakura gave his instructions.

“Time to use my high spirits to dodge this bombardment!!”

Sendai Castle shook.

This was due to the battle for command between Masamune and the Seiryu in the main garden. But in the air control room at the center of the castle, Katakura used the large stepped room to spin his entire body around.

The control room was entirely filled with a group of sign frames scattered around the room in an unorganized mess. They hid the room’s walls, ceiling, and even floor as they illuminated Katakura from every direction.

As he stood in the center of the light, he swung both arms to open new sign frames.

Kagetsuna-kun: “1-1!”

The text was instantly swept away as if by surging waves. The torii-style spell sign frame opened near his head was a mindreading spell that directly read his thoughts. That was a technique of the nameless gods said to live in Oushuu according to the Far Eastern gods. It was using the divine name of Sukuna Abiko as a stand-in, but the spell created text that flew out of the sign frame and across the control room.

Kagetsuna-kun: “Okay, 1-1! Are you still alive!? You are, aren’t you?”

The following words were directly linked to his thoughts, so they arrived far too quickly to just be called “fast”.

Kagetsuna-kun: “Okay, so you’re alive! Good job! You did a really good job! But oh, now you’re dead! Take that path and you’re dead! So give up on that and take a different- oh, you’re dead again! But before you die, how about raising that right arm just a little!? Let’s see that beautiful armpit! And with that beautiful armpit-...that’s not enough! You suck at this! Raise it like you mean it! Okay, that’s one of you with a beautiful armpit! Now head straight on in like that and you’re through, so let’s work at tightening that sphincter and holding that

pose! Hold it! One of a multi-stage hit will reach you, but you don't have to cry! So just keep going straight → defend → sing a little song to pass the time for two seconds! Ah!? You're a girl!? ...Might I ask your hand in marriage, miss? What!? The others are waiting behind you!? Oh, shut up, all of you. I'll give you your instructions soon enough, so just rub some honey on your crotch and wait there like a bear! You can't dodge it from that position! Say 'uhah!' twice, move forward, and it'll all be over! In other words, you'll be a hero!"

After shouting, Katakura smashed the sign frames providing information on the two who had made it through, but he immediately began shouting some more.

Kagetsuna-kun: "I'll be doing 3, 4, and 5 all at once! Are you ready to take notes!? You are, right!? Well, if you are, you're dead! You're dead right now! You don't have to do that, so just listen to what I say and spin around! Spin right around! Like this: zwoosh! Write it out as a letter and it's δ! Hey! Who just said that wasn't a zwoosh!? I was thinking the same thing, so I'll have to have Yoshihime-sama, age 42, wear the Tres España summer uniform I've started to think is pretty nice and make a ton of profit for the Date clan! But for now, spin! Spin right now! Ah? What is it, Principal Yoshihime!? Age 12? I would expect nothing less from you! Okay, you there! Fly straight ahead for an 'ahahn'! That'll dodge it all!"

Katakura nodded.

Kagetsuna-kun: "This is a pain, but let's get all of you through at once!!"

The seven gods of war passed through the lightning strikes as they raced through the sky.

This was thanks to Katakura's instructions and the relay management handled by...

Caretaker: "I will take care of that, so give this your all, everyone!"

One of them shouted "Testament!" and the others soon followed.

They flew forward.

The seven gods of war flew through the racing lightning more than they did dodge it.

They tore through the wind and based their movements around their outstretched arms as they approached...

"The Seiryu!"

Once they were within five hundred meters, they gained ground much faster. Due to the great power of the Seiryu's lightning, its firing range was limited to avoid interference.

The lightning could be fired constantly, but it could only be fired in about eight directions around the Seiryu. Simply put, the number of blasts was reduced.

“——!!”

Three of the seven flying gods of war moved forward. They slipped past the lightning pillars and threw their upper bodies forward as they accelerated.

They could only hear the sound of the wind around them as they broke through the barrier of distance. But...

Kagetsuna-kun: “You fools!”

As soon as Katakura shouted via sign frame, those three gods of war were scorched and blasted several hundred meters away.

Blows of lightning light had struck the three of them. They had avoided those on Katakura’s instructions before, but...

Kagetsuna-kun: “Did their trajectory change!?”

The Seiryu was still firing in the same eight directions. But instead of firing them straight at its targets, it fired them so they curved around its own body.

The wind and current instantly went beyond a mere downpour and became a thunderstorm. And that raging mountain storm approached the four remaining gods of war.

“...”

It tried to wrap around them and crush them.

It tried to devour them.

But just then, something pierced the Seiryu from below.

It was Oniniwa. Sagetsu, his god of war, held a large sword.

“I’ll be taking that!”

The Oni flew in a straight line to fell the dragon.

Oniniwa poured all his strength into the attack and he realized his hope had been fulfilled.

In the sky above, the Seiryu answered his hope while surrounded by blue lightning.

When he had said “I’ll be taking that”, he had not been referencing the Seiryu’s life or the next turn to attack. Instead...

“Oni love lightning too!”

The eight blasts of lightning targeting his fellow gods of war were instead launched straight down toward him.

The Seiryu had made an instantaneous decision. It had reacted on animalistic reflex, without thinking of the consequences, but...

“That’s just fine!!”

Oniniwa received the eight lightning blasts with his body.

He consumed the lightning. He was using an anti-lightning spell at full power, but a great sound split, the light turned to white, and Sagetsu’s armor was blown away. But he had to consume it all here. He had to make a full-power charge and take all eight dragon attacks on his own. After all...

“Go!”

The four surviving gods of war responded. With nothing standing in their way, they swiftly created four straight lines as their blade tips raced toward the blue dragon. Each individual attack was underpowered, but...

Kagetsuna-kun: “The four of you together qualifies as an invitation for one! You’re all striking at blind spots and targeting weak points...oh, how lame. Upupu. But winning’s all that matters, so I’d love it if you thanked me! I’ll guide you along paths that won’t lead to a collision even if it dodges, so clench your asses and charge on in! If anyone of you get hit, I’ll record it and leak it onto the divine network to honor you, so let’s finish this in a respectable fashion!”

The four gods of war flew onward. The Seiryu tried to respond, but it was too late. It had no ether current around itself and it lacked enough lightning, so Oniniwa yelled to them.

“Go!”

They did so before he could even speak.

But Oniniwa saw something unexpected there.

...*Masamune!*?

To Oniniwa, the Seiryu looked like Masamune.

That's strange, he thought. Masamune isn't supposed to be aboard the Seiryu. But...

Caretaker: "Vice President!"

Text flew out at high speed as if it were being carved into his mind.

Kagetsuna-kun: "Make it in time!!"

Oniniwa wondered what Katakura hoped would make it in time, but as the 2nd Special Duty Officer in charge of trials, he viewed the evidence before him and reached a certain conclusion.

...The Seiryu has learned from Masamune's movements!

As Date's leader, she had been training in the main garden. It was partially to maintain her weakening body, but more to show everyone she still could.

The Seiryu used those exact movements as it brought its hands to its hips in a familiar way.

"Is it going to draw them!?"

Ether sprayed out in empty space.

It then quickly drew two swords glowing with too pale a light to be crescent moons.

...Well done!

He and Narumi had taught Masamune sword fighting. She was smaller and more slender than the two of them, so they had focused their lessons on instantaneous strength and a steady hand more than strength.

The Seiryu used those exact same movements. That proved that the Seiryu could choose the optimum movements for attack and defense, but it also proved that it was receiving feedback from Masamune. So...

"Ohhh!"

The two glowing swords drew two arcs and made an explosive attack on the four approaching machines.

Four blasts of destruction filled the sky and they were broken down into several shapes.

The four gods of war charging the Seiryu had been cut down by the two swords wrapped in lightning light.

But the destruction was not perfect.

Kagetsuna-kun: “So I made it in time...”

Katakura had given them course corrections. He spent a lot of time in the main garden, so he knew what paths Masamune’s swords took. He had made the decision based on that knowledge. With some additional help from Rusu, all four destroyed gods of war had been spared a fatal blow.

And now the Seiryu was in its follow-through stance after swinging the lightning swords in both arms, so...

Caretaker: “Oniniwa-sama! Just one breath longer!”

Fang: “Are you taking into account how long an Oni’s breaths are!?”

Sagetsu flew in front of the Seiryu and collided with it.

Sparks flew as metal clashed with metal.

But Sagetsu had already lost its primary and secondary armor and it was surrounded by shimmering heat. Two of the four wings on its back would not activate and only functioned as ballast.

It lacked speed, it lacked the weight needed for a collision, and it had only just recovered from almost crashing.

Meanwhile, the Seiryu swung its two swords and received the Oni while seeming to puff its chest out proudly. It relied on the thrust of its six wings to endure the blow and swung its entire body to exorcise the Oni.

But Oniniwa was not driven out. He bent both arms that had refused to let go of the large sword during the lightning strikes. Instead of swinging it, he passed it behind his opponent’s back. Once he grabbed the sword tip and hilt in his hands, he would remain with his opponent until his arms were broken. And he used Sagetsu to...

“Push!!”

The Seiryu gave a defiant roar.

One had four half-broken wings and the other had six full-power wings. The one with more naturally won and did so instantly. But even as Sagetsu was pushed...

“Ohhhh!!”

Oniniwa raised his left leg in midair and bent his body backwards.

“Backwards front suplex!!”

Oniniwa had bet his victory on a single point.

If the Seiryu had learned Masamune’s movements...

...Its close-quarters attacks are meant for an opponent bigger than it!

It would lower its hips for a stable foundation but stretch forward to gain as much reach as possible.

That was exactly what had happened. The Seiryuu stretched its body out as if reaching over him to crush him.

So Oniniwa had bent his own body just like he had taught Masamune to. Normally, he would have dodged and moved behind his opponent, but he did not do that here. He lowered his body even further and secured a lock with his arms and the sword passed behind the Seiryu.

“Fall!!”

He used the Seiryu’s thrust to rotate it backwards.

They spun around.

His opponent’s shoulders and chest seemed to pull him forward, so he was on top and his opponent was on bottom.

There was no ground in the sky, but Oniniwa did not stop the power from the wings on his back. He pushed the Seiryu down toward the earth. His wings had lost their strength, but he still forced them down. And...

“_____”

The Seiryu roared and raised its wings to avoid hitting the ground.

“I won’t let you!”

Oniniwa raised the inside of his locked right elbow. This was a technique for a small individual to use against a large opponent. When holding their opponent, they just had to predict their opponent’s movements and stop the initial motion by pressing in on the muscles in the hips or back. And starting with that first spot, Oniniwa suppressed the Seiryu’s movements one after another. He used his wings to accelerate down toward the ground while applying pressure to the Seiryu’s hips, back, sides, and thighs to rapidly lock up its movements.

...I taught Masamune this technique as well.

But since it was a technique the small used against the large, he had not taught her how to escape this grappling hold. That naturally meant the Seiryu could not react.

“————!!”

The dragon roared, but it was no use. The wings on its locked back altered their trajectory. The thrust scattered in several directions and Oniniwa bounced through the air with the Seiryu as he continued accelerating straight down.

But he did not let go. He was intent on bringing the dragon down.

He could not afford to let go and he had to pacify it.

So...

“Fire!”

A physical blow answered his cry.

It was anti-air fire from the edge of Sendai’s Harmonic Territory.

The anti-warship fire struck the Seiryu and Oniniwa.

The destruction became a musical instrument that produced a strained rhythm with the impacts acting as applause.

As everything burst around him and many of the impacts hit him as well, Oniniwa thought to himself.

...I must pacify it!

After all...

...I've read the Testament descriptions!

Oniniwa had known what the Testament said about him even before inheriting the name. When Hashiba made their Korean expedition, Date sent him to Hashiba to help.

Hashiba had already begun that expedition, so he could be invited to Hashiba at any time.

That was why he felt it was imperative that he pacify the Seiryu. Before going to Hashiba, he had to pacify the rampaging dragon and leave Masamune safe in her position as the head of Date.

Narumi would be the same.

Hashiba would eventually remove Narumi and him from Date to take away a large part of their fighting force.

Kagetsuna-kun: “Sorry about earlier, Oniniwa-san...”

He saw text among the impacts and destruction. It was from Katakura who had fallen into low spirits.

Kagetsuna-kun: “Maybe I should have had those four go for a suicide run.”

I do not mind, thought Oniniwa while mentally shaking his head. Those were the ones who had to protect Date once he and Narumi were gone, so he could not have them being treated the same as him.

To put it another way, he would be leaving for Hashiba, so it did not matter how badly injured he was here.

Yes, that's right, he thought with a bitter smile in his heart. *I'm here to survive and cause some trouble for Hashiba.*

He felt an impossible smile on the nonexistent lips of his god of war body. The Seiryu was putting up a desperate struggle, but it was no use. He could see shells striking the dragon's back and the scattering ether light washed over him.

The metal sparks down below were nothing but fragments of physical shells, but despite the great quantity of attacks, the Seiryu was still not destroyed.

It was a sturdy dragon. That was all the more reason he had to pacify it. He had to pacify it and make it Masamune's. He had to offer the dragon up to the Date clan and then say goodbye. So...

“Narumi!!”

As if to accuse him for calling to his comrade, the Seiryu moved. It grabbed his arms and instantly broke them. But Oniniwa smiled. He pressed his chest against the dragon and held himself in place as if listening to his enemy’s pulse.

“I’m counting on you!!”

They fell straight down to the earth.

The pressure of the raging wind and lightning grew within the main garden.

The battle outside was likely intensifying. Narumi could tell the explosive pressure grew whenever the Seiryu felt it was in danger. But...

“Kh!”

Narumi stabbed her mandible sword into the ground to hold her position when she was almost blown off her feet. She shifted the sword and her arms again and again to force her position further forward, but the dragon’s roar rang out as if to ignore all that. Its voice was loud enough to blow away the main garden’s flowers and send clumps of dirt dancing through the air.

The stream’s water became an even thicker mist and...

...Is my body going to give out?

The ground was shaking beneath her. Both the crust and the pallet below that were beginning to break apart from the shaking. At this rate, the main garden’s floor would break through and it would all fall to the story below.

That would mean Masamune fell too, but the gate’s opening was a spatial issue and the Seiryu was in control at the moment. When the floor broke through, the roar would continue and the destruction would swallow up even Masamune as it propagated out from the main garden like threads and reached each floor’s frame.

In the worst case, Sendai Castle itself would collapse.

So Narumi moved forward. She moved forward as much as she had been forced back. She raised her thighs and used her one means of continuing ahead. She rapidly re-summoned her limbs and used her sword as a cane. That was the only option.

But the roar continued, and...

“————!!”

The explosive pressure became a cry powerful enough to distort the surrounding scenery.

The Seiryu knew it was cornered. It had sensed danger. But...

...It's crumbling!?

She suddenly felt nothing from the ground below her feet. Either the foundation pallet supporting the main garden had shifted out of place or the frame had fallen away. The ground was undulating more than tilting.

...Oh, no!

Even so, Narumi tried to continue forward. She sharply narrowed her eyes and worked to not lose sight of her goal.

“Honestly!”

This isn't like me, she thought as the second blast arrived.

It was a roar of explosive pressure just like before.

Her hair trembled first and then grew faintly electrified. She ignored the crumbling ground and held her sword out toward the following shockwave. She knew she would be caught in the collapse like this, but...

“I can't give up, can I?”

A different cry seemed to answer her question.

It came from the corridor behind her that led to the diplomatic quarters. First, she heard a door behind kicked down, and then...

“What is the meaning of this racket!? I just got to the confession scene, so how about some peace and quiet!?”

Someone charged in with that loud complaint.

It was Musashi's half-dragon.

Chapter 56: Charger in the Wind

第五十六章

『風の突撃士』



馬鹿の行き先は
真っ正面
それが不可避の法則か
配点 (常識)

An idiot

Always goes straight ahead

Is that an unavoidable law?

Point Allocation (Common Knowledge)

Narumi saw something strange.

The space was being pushed back by explosive pressure, lightning, and ether waves, but the half-dragon broke right through the wind and everything else.

That rare species was said to have developed on this planet at some point before even the Age of the Gods. In the heavens, they had been modified on a species level, so they had gained several different forms and traits.

...Such as...

They could supposedly read the wind, view the sky as their territory even within violent gusts of wind, and break through it all, but it seemed all that was true.

The acceleration organs across his body were opened and he breathed in the raging wind. And once he reached Narumi...

“Is that what’s causing all this racket!?”

His front wings pierced and parted the explosive pressure approaching from ahead. As for the crumbling footing...

“Be still!!”

He used a Catholic barrier spell. It was a tuning spell that inquisitors used to secure an execution ground. For several meters around them, the ground instantly solidified and everyone in the opposite passageway cried out in surprise.

“The hell is that!? Cheats!?”

“It’s...y’know! That weird half-dragon! The really weird one!”

“Oh, you mean the source of all that weird shouting about loving elder sisters!? The one who doesn’t know how to use walkthroughs!?”

I can't really argue with that, thought Narumi as she looked up at the half-dragon standing in front of her.

“Thanks. You saved me.”

“I am a reliable half-dragon. It was the least I could-...”

The half-dragon looked back but then gave a snort.

“Not that I want a non-elder sister like you relying on me.”

“I think you should pay more attention to the situation before you speak. ...Look.”

Narumi and the half-dragon both sent attacks to the center of the main garden. She used a sword and he used the end of his front wing. The double attack shattered the ether wave flying toward them as pressure.

“You can do more than I thought.”

“Ho ho? Meanwhile, I was thinking ‘Is that all you can do?’ ”

“Testament. I forgot to add ‘not that that’s saying much’.”

“Why do you insist on picking fights with me? I’m pretty scary when I’m angry. I’m a real monk, after all.”

Please spare me this, she thought from the bottom of her heart. So...

“Let’s go. I feel like getting this over with and drinking some nice sake.”



The pressure had weakened a little, but she did not know if that was confusion over the previous destruction or if Oniniwa was having some success. Regardless, Musashi's ambassador looked up while hiding down in the stream.

“_____!”

Narumi could not hear her over the wind and pressure, but the half-dragon nodded.

“ ‘Onee-san’, huh? Well done, Suzu...”

“How strange... I never knew someone could leave me at such a loss for a reaction...”

When Narumi said that, the half-dragon handed her something. *What?* she wondered while grabbing it so it was not blown away in the wind. It turned out to be a cloth separated into a few different parts.

“That is a thong. The wind has been leaving you rather exposed and I thought that might not be appropriate for a lady.”

“...You just charge right on in with everything, don't you?”

“You don't get it? This is a bonus that came with the porn game I am currently playing. Oh, but don't worry. It belongs to Toori, so I didn't pay anything for it. Direct your thanks to God and put it on while saying nothing more.”

A number of thoughts came to mind, but she decided to put it on since it might help increase her defenses.

...Eh? Why is the fabric so nice?

Our brand is supposed to be pretty good, so is this just a good match for me?

At any rate, the half-dragon swayed a bit and started forward.

“Let's go.”

“Wait. ...I want to check something first.”

“What is it?” he asked. “My birthday is September 7 and my favorite food is lamb cooked in a tomato sauce.”

“That wasn't what I wanted to know. ...This foothold spell is for executions, isn't it?”

If so...

“If you don’t follow your precepts by executing someone in the name of god, you will receive divine punishment.”

“Do not worry about it. I will complete the execution. After all, I wish to be an inquisitor. As for the foothold, I merely wanted a place to land. That is all.”

“Then,” said Narumi as she thrust her sword out toward the half-dragon. “Hurry up and consecrate this into a sword worthy of a Catholic execution. ...Then I’ll help you, inquisitor. And I’ll have you help me, Musashi 2nd Special Duty Officer. Help me retrieve our Chancellor and President.”

“I’m not good with complicated things, so sum it up in five words.”

“Just do what I say.”

“Judge.”

The half-dragon slapped her sword with his left hand. With a definite vibration, a charm was attached and a bluish-white light surrounded the sword.

Then he moved forward. She followed and as if in response...

“_____”

Light expanded in the center of the main garden.

The “gate” of ether light was clearly opening. And something arrived from the void within.

“The Seiryu...!”

The upper body of a god of war appeared in the main garden.

Suzu perceived that form while cowering down and using the edge of the stream like an umbrella.

The god of war was shaking and wrapped in heat. Its metal body clattered together with itself like a musical instrument. But Suzu sensed something odd.

...*Why?*

She sensed something like anger or rage coming from the god of war. Its cry was shaking and the heat came from within rather than without. Also...

...You can't...restrain it?

The answer came as a powerful cry.

The Seiryu roared as if to say all it had was strength and that stopping would mean its death.

“...!!”

Unable to bear its own power, it shook and released a scream-like cry. It seemed to be saying it had no choice but to be driven on by its power even if it did not know where that power was headed.

...Why?

Suzu did not understand. But as the Seiryu continued going even as it cried out in pain, she sensed something other than anger and rage in its roar.

...Why are you...apologizing...?

Suzu realized something: *This god of war is...sad.*

It seemed to her that something sad must have happened and it wanted to do something about it but it did not know what to do. However, it had power, so it was simply trying to do something with that power.

Suzu understood.

A long time ago, something sad had happened and someone had wanted to do something but they had not known what to do. However, they had not had any power, so they had tried to get rid of themselves.

Back then, Suzu too had not known what to do and been unable to do anything, but that person had finally learned to cry, something had changed, and something had returned.

This was the same. It had to be the same. This dragon was the same.

Something sad had happened.

But because it had power, it had trusted in and clung to that with the same determination that had once made someone try to get rid of themselves.

And in Suzu's opinion, this dragon's roar was not a sorrowful wail.

...It's saying it has to save someone.

With that thought, Suzu began to move. She had been knocked over by the pressure coming from the Seiryu and even the deepest part of the stream's water splashed up onto her, but she still moved. She crawled along the artificial stream bed and spoke to the dragon's bearer.

“Masamune...-san...”

Immediately, the Seiryu leaned forward overhead.

The heat of lightning raced through Suzu's senses and even more air was blown away as it arched back and roared.

“...!”

Suzu was knocked below the small bridge over the stream. Masamune still sat atop it, unmoving and with her head hanging limply down, but Suzu rolled out the other side and perceived something there.

...What is...that?

Two figures were breaking through the explosive pressure and approaching her. They used brute force to approach at high speed.

They were Urquiaga and Date Narumi.

Narumi weighed the danger against the result as she ran.

She was no longer moving along the crumbling ground. She instead used anything her feet could catch on like fallen trees and garden stones that seemed to float there.

The loosened ground should have sunk down with each step she took, but she followed after the half-dragon by controlling her strength with rapid adjustments made by repeatedly summoning Unturning Centipede. Meanwhile, she thought to herself.

...I didn't think the Seiryu would actually appear.

It had only ever been the gate before, so they had only needed to destroy that.

Since the Seiryu had come out this time, it must have gained much more power. That was why they had to force the Seiryu back through the gate.

She knew that would not be easy, but they had a chance.

Oniniwa had to have done quite well against the Seiryu. The current of ether that surrounded

it was almost entirely gone. That was why it was trying to heal itself by drawing in the torrent of ether filling the main garden. Its upper body was exposed, but it could not move much while healing itself. So...

“Where should I aim!?”

The half-dragon’s question was sharp. No, perhaps it was only natural for a dragon. Even though he could not see her, Narumi brought her empty hand to her neck as she spoke.

“The top of the throat. There’s a weak point there on the border between the chin and the neck. The frame was bent there to fill the space needed to give clearance to the moving parts.”

That was classified information, but the situation left her with no other choice. Plus, that spot was too small to target with a god of war or cannon.

“It’s only about five centimeters wide. ...Are you confident you can hit it?”

“I could hit that with incredible ease, but I’ll leave it to you. So...”

The half-dragon suddenly lowered his speed. There was no point in wondering why. To obtain acceleration power, he had opened all of his respiratory organs and started taking in the air.

“Such excellent air. It is not as pure as the higher altitudes, but the ether has dissolved in nicely.”

With that, the half-dragon took a light step forward. He placed his foot on the loose earth of the crumbling ground for an impossible step. But he took it all the same and moved forward.

“Can you keep up with me?”

“Do you think I can’t?”

“I see.”

He nodded and did something unexpected.

He turned to the right and grabbed her empty hand with the three fingered on hand on his left front wing.

“...Eh?”

As soon as she raised her voice in confusion, the half-dragon launched himself powerfully forward while still turned to the side and holding her hand.

He used all of this wings and accelerators for a great acceleration which was void of hesitation.

Narumi was certain they would be blown away.

She was currently hanging in midair. While holding her hand, the half-dragon thrust his right front wing forward and accelerated as if preparing to knee someone.

The Seiryu was up ahead. So was the stream, the bridge over it, and Masamune on that.

The Seiryu noticed them at a distance of twenty meters and faced them.

“...!!”

Its roar was like a beam attack. The invisible pressure of its voice flew toward them as a visible distortion of the air.

The half-dragon did not care. He pulled his right arm back just a little.

“Ohhh!!”

And he made full use of the accelerator on his right elbow. Acceleration light gave greater speed to the half-dragon, his attack, and Narumi.

...He's breaking through!?

He smashed the pressure with brute force alone.

The sound split, several lines of vacuum raced out, and those tore shallowly into Narumi and the half-dragon's skin.

But the half-dragon's acceleration was not stopped.

A stable acceleration with adequate weight pulled on Narumi who was already accustomed to keeping her balance.

The half-dragon in front of her kept his back to her, broke through the obstacles up ahead, and unilaterally accelerated.

And he was on a collision course. As he moved in a straight line ahead, he asked her a question through the blowing wind.

“I have one question! ...Is that god of war Masamune's!?”

“Testament!!”

She did not know how he reacted to her answer. But after a short pause, he gave her instructions.

“I will pull that god of war’s body forward. You circle below it and pierce its weak point.”

At the same time, he let go of her hand.

He was going in without any doubt. They had a chance at victory, so he leaned his upper body forward while implicitly telling her he was counting on her. He finally thrust both front wings forward.

“I! Blast! Off!!”

He achieved even greater speeds for the remaining distance of less than ten meters.

Katakura observed the video and audio arriving at the control room. It was filled with static, but...

...So that’s how he’s doing it!

The half-dragon had placed his sights on Masamune.

It was true the Seiryu was linked to Masamune even if she had lost all control. The Seiryu was influenced by and receiving power from Masamune, so it was trying to “obtain” her rather than protect her.

To the dragon, was its very source of life nothing more than a meal? Katakura did not know, but the Seiryu would be forced to focus on the half-dragon’s charge if he targeted Masamune herself.

“So he’s trying to snatch her up to move the Seiryu.”

It was unclear whether the Seiryu was aware of it or not, but Masamune was its master. Even in the ether supply to the Seiryu, she was treated as the master.

If Masamune was moved away, the Seiryu likely would try to follow. Since only its upper body stuck out from the gate, that would mean leaning far forward.

That was the half-dragon’s aim.

He would move Masamune, which would move the Seiryu, and Narumi would charge into the

gap.

Narumi was accelerating forward as well. She stepped along the stakes driven into the stream's bank at even intervals, she held her sword down and to the left, and she charged in from the Seiryu's right.

Then the half-dragon accelerated straight in toward Masamune.

“That elder sister character is mine!”

He smashed through the bridge's railing and reached both arms toward Masamune who was down on her knees.

His aim was accurate, *just as expected*. So Katakura gave a cry.

“Ah, you fool!!”

The Seiryu had perfectly predicted the half-dragon's move and hit him with a casually backhand blow.

...You idiooooot!!

Narumi just about tripped as she ran along the stakes.

She heard an impact like metal objects colliding and she saw the half-dragon spin five times through the air.

The plan had failed.

The Seiryu had not moved its upper body in the slightest. It had only swung its right arm outwards.

This means I have to do it on my own, decided Narumi. And...

“_____”

The Seiryu turned toward her as she charged in.

It pulled back a little in preparation to roar. The explosive pressure would be launched just a moment later.

She could break through the pressure by charging in with her mandible sword. Then she would have to target the weak point.

...Can I do it?

However, she was not the one to answer her own question.

It was the half-dragon. Even after he was sent flying back, he forced his body around to right himself.

“Mukai!!”

Suzu moved. She got out from under the bridge that the pressure had knocked her below.

...Urquiaga-kun...did that...for me...!

Urquiaga had destroyed the bridge's railing in his charge, so she just had to reach out her arms.

“Masa...mune...-san!”

She grabbed Masamune's hand, so she pulled. She pulled not with her arms, but with her back and her entire body.

“Nnn!”

The girl left the bridge. She suddenly felt all weight vanish from Masamune, but that meant the girl's limp body fell toward her. That was a success. Suzu tried to catch Masamune but had trouble and was knocked to the ground below her. However, Suzu was the older one, so she tried to roll on top of Masamune to protect her.

That was when pressure reached them from overhead.

It was the dragon god of war. It leaned far out to pursue Masamune, but Suzu breathed in. It did not matter that the dragon was trying to send its roar their way.

“Narumi...-s-san!”

Her cry received a definite response.

Someone flew in from the side. They swung a giant sword upwards while rotating their body for the strength of momentum.

“Testament.”

It was Date Narumi.

Her attack slid through the air and struck the top of the dragon's throat.

A moment later, Katakura saw the Seiryu leaning far back on the staticky sign frame.

“...!!”

It destroyed the ceiling with a great roar, but it was also falling down to the depths of the gate.

There was an explosion of light and the sign frame shattered. Katakura clenched his fist just once, but...

“Oh, right. I'm in low spirits right now,” he muttered while listening to everyone cheering in the control room. “Honestly, we haven't actually defeated it, you know? ...What do we do now?”

But as he sighed toward the floor, he walked toward the exit while returning the guys' requests for high fives.

“General Affairs Committee, call the Administrative Committee's construction team and have them get on those internal repairs ASAP! And god of war unit, pass news of this onto the team collecting Oniniwa and the others! ...We're going to be busy starting tomorrow!”

They all nodded at that, but...

“Starting tomorrow? Don't you mean starting today?”

An unexpected voice reached Katakura from directly ahead.

Both the people in the control room and the people in the hallway came to a stop.

“Principal Yoshihime!”

“Testament,” confirmed a woman with a single demonic horn and a red Russian-style summer uniform in the dimly lit hallway.

This was Date Yoshihime. She was Masamune's mother and she gestured Katakura over with her chin, so he pushed up his glasses and spoke.

“What do you need, Yoshihime, Age 12?”

“I'm glad to hear you remembered. Let's head to the main garden to pick up Masamune. And...how about we tell the Musashi group a number of things?”

“Are you sure?” asked Katakura as a representative of the silence surrounding them. “That will mean getting into the issues surrounding Masamune and Kojirou-kun...as well as Mogami’s Komahime and Sviet Rus’s Honjou.”

“And what’s wrong with that? Trying to hide it is pointless. ...Also, an elderly woman from Hiraizumi just sent me a request.”

Namely...

“She said Musashi is most likely unbelievably good-natured, so we should look after them.”

Chapter 57: Speaker of the Past

第五十七章

『過去下の語り人』



それは振り返らず
済む筈だったもの
配点（約束）

It should have meant

Not having to look back

Point Allocation (Promise)

“Is it over?”

Yoshiyasu took a breath after confirming that the lights in the eastern sky had vanished.

She suddenly realized the atmosphere had changed.

The temperature was beginning to drop. As the early summer night wore on, the lingering chill of spring set in.

But when she looked back, Mogami Yoshiaki continued staring up into the sky. She did, however, set down her pitcher of sake.

“Would you like a drink?”

“...No thanks.”

Yoshiyasu was aware how much trouble she had with alcohol. She had learned her lesson back in IZUMO and she swore she would eventually pay Houjou back for that humiliation. *Yes, I'll grow nice and big too*, she thought with a mental clench of the fist. Meanwhile, the vassal sniffed at the sake.

“Is that amazake? I'll have some! That's nonalcoholic, right!?”

I screwed up! thought Yoshiyasu as Yoshiaki smiled bitterly toward her and the vassal who held out a cup. Yoshiaki took the cup from the vassal and handed her a spare bowl.

“Mogami's sake rice helps keep out the cold.”

“Ohhh, it's full of sake lees! How luxurious, how classy, how genuine.”

“Yoshiaki, about what we were discussing before...”

“Yes, I'm feeling a little drunk now, so I suppose I can tell you a little.”

Yoshiaki poured a new cup of amazake, clinked it together with the vassal's, and drank it.

After a while, she suddenly continued speaking.

“You mean the ‘promise’, right? I was part of that.”

And...

“They dreamed of a large community stretching from Oushuu to Sviet Rus. Without realizing that was what they wanted, the children wished to remain like family. ...It was the kind of dream only children can have.”

Horizon sat at a table inside the girls’ room.

She nodded at Mary who was wearing pajamas and serving everyone tea to help wake them up.

Hori-ko: “A community?”

That sounded like an easy thing to create, but she wondered if that was only due to her ignorance of the world. So...

Hori-ko: “What do you think, Masazumi-sama?”

Vice President: “It depends on how far they were planning to take this community. Was it simply a promise of mutual assistance, was it an alliance, or were they going to go so far as to share the same currency and laws?”

Masazumi added an “of course” as she continued.

Vice President: “The further you go, the harder it is to construct. To share things means to quit the old way of doing things and to prepare new ones, so it comes with a cost and the people must go through an update as well.”

Mary viewed a sign frame while pouring tea into two more teacups.

“If you don’t have a specific plan for the community, then you don’t have to go through all that. In England, my sister is working hard to have England and the other three nations work together.”

“Are you sure you don’t mean she is ‘having trouble’ doing that?”

Horizon asked about a possible correction and Mary smiled.

“If you say that, my sister will get angry and work even harder to prove you wrong.”

Gold Mar: “Ma-yan really did put the Fairy Queen through a lot of trouble, didn’t she?”

Mal-Ga: “I can see why she decided to kill that ninja...”

10ZO: “I was not killed! I was not!!”

Scarred: “Judge. ...We live together now.”

Girls: “Wow...”

Horizon did not entirely understand, but she did feel an intense power in that.

Hori-ko: “Toori-sama, I suppose I’ll ask while I’m at it: what are your thoughts on a community?”

Horizon asked as Mary nodded and carried the two teacups out into the hall.

Hori-ko: “Do you have any thoughts on the dream that Yoshiaki-sama mentioned?”

Me: “What Yoshihikari was mentioning isn’t a dream.”

Hori-ko: “Do you honestly think that misreading of her name is amusing? As for the rest of that... What? Why would you say that?”

“This girl...” he said before actually answering.

Me: “Well? Are you listening? If we’re gonna look at this community stuff from a porn game perspective, you have to start with mind-sharing material, and... Ah! Why is everyone canceling my posts!?”

Hori-ko: “Not to worry. I will view your posts right up until the end of the world. 5, 4, 3, 2...”

Me: “Is that countdown supposed to be to the end of the world!?”

She ignored him and took a sip of tea. It was herbal tea. She pulled some biscotti from the space behind her which complimented the tea nicely. Going with the peanut rice cake flavor for variation had been the right choice.

At any rate, she more or less understood what the idiot was trying to say.

Hori-ko: “You are saying it was only a ‘dream’ because the adults said it was, aren’t you?”

Me: “Pretty much, yeah. ...The only people who’d get all excited about calling it a community or whatever are the adults and people like Neshinbara. So little Masamune and

the others must've seen it differently.”

Just as Horizon prepared to ask what he meant, a voice reached her from the door. It was Mary's.

“Save you from anything.”

Horizon looked over and saw Mary smiling with the tray of teacups in her right hand and her left hand on the door.

“They probably didn't use those words, but they must have said something similar. For example...yes, they may have made a promise to be friends forever.”

“A promise, you say?”

“Judge.” Mary nodded with a smile and opened the door. “People keep the promises they make as children. That's what I believe.”

When Mary stepped out into the hall, Mitotsudaira and Shigenaga each took a teacup from her. Shigenaga hung her head as she did so.

“This was supposed to be unofficial...”

“Refusing an offer from an English princess would be a diplomatic problem, you know?” pointed out Mitotsudaira.

Of course, she could always say she was refusing the offer specifically due to diplomatic reasons, but the situation had not deteriorated that far yet. Mary bowed with the tray in both hands and glanced over toward the boys' room on the left.

Mitotsudaira wondered why.

...*Oh.*

She realized why, so she quickly moved to call the 1st Special Duty Officer, but...

“Wah!!”

The door flew open like someone had kicked it and the ninja came rolling out. The Chancellor's voice and the sounds of someone rapidly tapping a button came from within.

“Hey, Mary, Tenzou was getting all spoiled wishing he could have some tea too, so could you make some for him?”

Mitotsudaira did not even need to look back to know how Mary would react.

“Judge! Um, what about you?”

Hori-ko: “You leave me no choice. I will serve him with the personal items I brought from the Musashi. Oh, dear. I brought coffee beans but not a grinder. ...Well, live and learn.”

Me: “Wait, wait, wait, wait. Hold it, hold it, hold it, hold it. What in the world are you planning now?”

After a while, Mary carried out a cup of tea and a container of coffee beans topped with green onion soy sauce. After Mary returned to the girls’ room with a smile, Shigenaga spoke up straight across from Mitotsudaira.

“Is that good?”

“I’m sure one of them is. The other one probably tastes like coffee beans and green onion soy sauce.”

Mitotsudaira then asked a question.

“Now, I understand what kind of ‘promise’ you made. ...The adults were worried about Oushuu and Sviet Rus’s future, so they brought together this generation’s leaders and major fighters when they were young and successfully built up relationships of friendship between them. Is that right?”

“Testament. ...For Date it was Masamune and Kojirou. For Mogami, it was Komahime. And for Sviet Rus, it was me since I would fight the final battle against Date and Mogami. Sviet Rus apparently wanted to get Qing-Takeda and Houjou involved too if possible, but Qing-Takeda had Yoshitsune for a leader and Houjou was too embroiled in infighting over succession to build any major connections.”

She took a breath.

“For guardians, Date sent Yoshihime as Masamune and Kojirou’s mother, Mogami sent Yoshiaki, and Sviet Rus sent Kagekatsu, who had inherited Lord Kenshin’s name, and Marfa. ...We were taught and trained quite a bit by our mothers and future upperclassmen.”

Vice President: “Can you ask something for me?”

What is it? wondered Mitotsudaira as Masazumi asked her question.

Vice President: “I understand Shigenaga being there, what with the final battle against Date and Mogami. Masamune makes sense too. But...why Kojirou and Komahime?”

Mitotsudaira showed Shigenaga the question on her sign frame. Shigenaga took a sip of tea and a breath.

“That’s right,” she said to preface her thoughts. “According to the Testament descriptions, it was discovered that Yoshihime was trying to make Kojirou the heir, so Masamune killed him. ...And after Komahime was half-forcibly taken by Hashiba as Hashiba Hidetsugu’s concubine, she committed suicide along with Hidetsugu when he incurred the wrath of Hashiba.”

Those two had been doomed to die.

“We would eventually lose those two, but they were still our ‘family’. So we made a promise. ...We promised to protect them. We promised to find interpretations to overcome the history recreation of their deaths and then to let them be free.”

Masazumi breathed a heavy sigh in the diplomatic ship’s courtyard while still facing north.

She thought about Shigenaga’s use of the word “family” and what that had meant to them.

...Is this the spirit of Oushuu that Yasuhira mentioned?

They had a powerful will of resistance and a sense of fellowship that surpassed nation or family.

“In a way...you might be able to say their will to protect those two and keep them from being lost only served to strengthen their bonds.”

No, you probably need to be old enough to understand the meaning of loss to think that way, reconsidered Masazumi. As kids, they probably just didn’t want to lose each other and saw no further meaning in it.

At the elementary school Masazumi taught at part-time, some of the children would transfer to another school on the Musashi due to a parent’s job. Some of the children would cry when they had to leave, even though they knew they could still see their friends if they wanted to.

...Why is that?

The emotion of sorrow may have come from viewing a “change” as a “loss”.

But, she thought.

“They failed to keep that promise...”

“That’s right,” said the Aoi Sister.

She had already let go of Masazumi’s hand and was gently spinning around atop a stone by the pond. Her hair was swept up in the wind and she smiled while briefly pointing Masazumi’s way with her swinging hand.

“You know why that happened, don’t you?”

“I know all too well.”

Without an interpretation, they could not escape Kojirou’s murder and Komahime’s suicide. And Komahime’s case had been especially bad as it had involved Hashiba.

If Oushuu was to escape the history recreation involving Hashiba, what would have to happen? The answer was obvious.

“Matsudaira has to be greater than Hashiba. That was absolutely crucial, yet we lost.”

“Talk about spoiled. ...Couldn’t Oushuu have shown some backbone?”

There was no harshness in Naruze’s words. It was obvious she knew they had not had a choice. So Masazumi too walked out to the edge of the pond and answered.

“Qing-Takeda met rapid decline while Satomi and Edo were conquered to the south of Oushuu. The Musashi is being remodeled and Hashiba has dragon line reactors. Oushuu had no choice but to obey.”

Even as she said that, Masazumi asked a silent question.

...Is that really true?

Her question concerned Mogami.

Mogami’s Komahime was not their leader. So in Mogami’s history recreation...

...Mogami Yoshiaki would have been in control.

Something about that felt odd to Masazumi.

“Why did Komahime become a ghost two weeks ago?”

She had her doubts.

“Mogami Yoshiaki – who carried the spirit of Oushuu, knew the meaning of family, and had the final say in Mogami’s politics – accepted Komahime’s death without fighting it? Yet two

weeks later, she starts firing and showing a rebellious spirit?”

“She’s a sharp one.”

Adele heard Yoshiaki speak while looking up at the two moons.

When she noticed Adele’s gaze, she smiled with the ends of her eyebrows lowered and looked the other way. Then the fox’s hair moved as she looked up to the moons again.

“Komahime was a good girl. Clever too. ...As I lived in this land and, as a spirit, gained the power of this land, she was born from that power, so she is both my child and a child of this land.”

So...

“She knew very well I would resist and try to save her when Hashiba arrived with their request.”

“You don’t mean...”

“I do. ...She killed herself while I was not watching.”

Yoshiaki forced out a “ko ko” of laughter.

“That one hurt... It meant she did not trust that I could protect her.”

Her shoulders fell and she sighed toward the floor.

“Of course, it was the same for Date.”

Repairs and measurements were underway in the crumbled and partially caved-in main garden of Sendai Castle, but a conversation was also underway.

It occurred below the large tree in the center with leaves stripped and branches broken by the Seiryu’s pressure.

“Yes, it was the same for Kojirou.”

Yoshihime was speaking. She sat on the earthen ground and Masamune’s head rested on her lap. Masamune’s eyes were closed in peaceful sleep and Yoshihime’s hand held a healing charm to her forehead.

“Masamune and Kojirou are twins. It wasn’t easy giving birth to them.”

Yoshihime smiled bitterly. Musashi’s ambassador sat nearby with a blanket over her shoulders and the half-dragon sat cross-legged next to her.

“After all, they already had a bit of their horns then. They hurt unbelievably bad on the way out. I just wanted to shout, ‘This hurts like hell!’ Yoshiaki was there to help as a midwife and she was the one to tell me there was another one coming. I asked if it could wait another day, but that wasn’t possible.”

Flat Vassal: “Why are all this world’s mothers so massive?”

“If I had looked into it ahead of time, we would have known I had twins, but – just like Yoshiaki – I had no experience with men and didn’t want to let on that I was pregnant. So when I felt all the movement inside me during the pregnancy, I thought I was going to give birth to something with a whole bunch of arms and legs. I thought I was going to have to change my tastes.”

“Would you have...been fine with...that?”

Yoshihime nodded at the question from Musashi’s ambassador.

“Whatever they looked like, they would have been my child. They would have inherited a portion of me. At the very least, I wasn’t going to reject them until they’d grown up. Besides, they would be the Dragon God’s child. I knew this land of so many nonhumans would accept them, so I wanted to see what kind of child they would turn out to be.”

“The Dragon...God?”

“You saw him before, didn’t you? Then again, that may just be the form he was given after the fact.”

Yoshihime continued as Musashi’s ambassador tilted her head. She looked to the Vice Chancellor and Vice President who stood around them to protect them and she looked to Rusu inside her sign frame.

“The Dragon God is not from Shinto. He is one of the major spirits that lives in this land of Oushuu. But his power is great. ...Not even I could endure it. So when I was given his child, I realized that the Seiryu, which had been abandoned because we lacked the power to use it, had been sent to protect the child, despite the great burden it would cause. The Seiryu had enough power to process the Dragon God’s power. So by the second week, the Seiryu was already sealed in its dual pitch space as the child’s protector. That way, it could protect the child by letting them pilot it once they grew up.”

“But,” interjected the half-dragon. “The child the Seiryu was to protect turned out to be twins, right?”

Urquiaga understood a few things now.

...If this Dragon God tried to enter this world by residing in a human and being born...

“He would of course desire a perfect form. ...Pagan gods take male and female forms and many in India and elsewhere are both sexes. Oushuu’s Dragon God must have been the same. ...He created himself as a boy and a girl so the two could act as a single perfect form together, didn’t he?”

That would be why Masamune only had one horn. The other horn would be on Kojirou. But...

“Kojirou killed himself, didn’t he?”

“No, not actually.”

Urquiaga sensed Katakura looking to Narumi. Narumi responded by shaking her head a little and turning toward Urquiaga.

“Someone with the power of the Dragon God wouldn’t be able to kill themselves so easily, would they?”

“Then...”

“Testament,” confirmed Narumi. “When she found him still alive in the blood soaked living room, Masamune took Kojirou-sama’s life at his request.”

And...

“When Maeda arrived in Kantou after pursuing the Musashi, Hashiba had him use his spell to call back Kojirou-sama and Komahime and to fixate them in this world. Komahime must have had some kind of regret because her will seems to be stronger, but Kojirou-sama is more like a doll than anything.”

“It’s become quite a problem.” Yoshihime brushed up Masamune’s bangs. “We had been planning to only use the Seiryu during the battle with Shigenaga...no, we had hoped not to use it at all if possible, but with Kojirou in his current state, it’s grown unstable and they’ve lost all control. Due to Kojirou’s influence as a ghost, the Seiryu has become a mad dragon split between a semi-physical form and a fully physical form. It must not know whether to stay with Kojirou or Masamune or what to do. After all...”

After all...

“The Seiryu was supposed to live with and protect Masamune, but she killed Kojirou who she was supposed to live with and protect. It’s ironic. The Seiryu had never made a real appearance before, but it’s appeared almost nightly since Kojirou died.”

That isn’t good, thought Masazumi.

...So those are the circumstances of the three nations.

They had hoped to be a community and that dream had been destroyed, but the spirit of that dream still affected them all and tied them all together. Also...

“What’s the meaning of this?”

Naomasa placed a hand on her forehead but sighed in apparent disinterest. She was viewing a few documents sent over by Date’s Vice President and they revealed something about the Seiryu.

“It was sent to Date in secret about thirty years ago?”

It had been sent as a celebration of the future birth of Masamune and the fact that it was a weapon had been disguised.

And it had been sent by...

“Matsudaira Motonobu!?”

Hori-ko: “My father was sending a present to a girl who hadn’t even been born yet...?”

Worshiper: “Sniff, sniff, sniff! I smell a likeminded individual! I do!!”

Laborer: “I doubt that’s what this was, so you don’t have to say it.”

Was replying to him a virtue? Or was that unknowable? At any rate, Masazumi had a sudden thought about the Four Sacred Beasts.

...In light novels, the Four Sacred Beasts tend to have the Byakko at the west, the Seiryu at the east, the Suzaku at the south, and the Genbu at the north.

Comparing the Far East with the Four Sacred Beasts’ cardinal directions, the east and west seemed to match up. And since the Suzaku had been discovered in southern Kantou, that fit too. The north was still unknown, but...

...If Lord Motonobu set this up, did he place them at the four ends of the Far East as guardians?

The Shimabara Rebellion had been given an early recreation thirty years before. The Four Sacred Beasts had been developed by the Catholic force that had started the rebellion and all but the Byakko had gone missing after the rebellion.

If they required a massive amount of fuel, they would be forced to rely on the land's ley lines. That meant they would have a close relationship with the local spirits despite being a god of war.

"They really are like the Four Sacred Beasts."

She did not know why Lord Motonobu had done that, but Naomasa would have more to think about as the Suzaku's owner. As for Masazumi herself...

"...What am I supposed to do about all this?"

She had the special student general assembly tomorrow and the three nations meeting once she made it through that.

...How am I supposed to bring this all together?

How could she join together the three nations, whose dreams of a community had already been crushed, with Musashi, who had caused that? How could she prompt them to oppose Hashiba? She wondered if there was a way and she decided to try whatever she could come up with.

Vice President: "Ohiroshiki, I'm concerned about something, so give me all the information on the food supply. Things like the transition to population growth mentioned in the Testament descriptions."

Worshiper: "Oh? I don't mind, but are you sure? It's possible the Representative Committee Head is monitoring this conversation."

Vice President: "That's fine. You can't become a politician if you're afraid of having your plans exposed."

She received a reply after a short delay.

Worshiper: "Flatda-kun."

Vice President: "What kind of name is that?"

But when she looked, his post contained some compressed and passcode-locked data. It was

set to only unlock after detecting her voice.

Worshiper: “I am not a kind enough person to show off my information to strangers, Flatdakun. ...I think you take some of these things too seriously. No, maybe I should say you take too much responsibility onto yourself.”

This isn't someone you get lectured by every day, she thought. But...

Vice President: “That's just what a politician does.”

Then she realized something.

Vice President: “Sorry.”

...Ohiroshiki was being considerate specifically because that's what a politician does.

She was the one that did not understand. But then a response appeared on her sign frame.

Worshiper: “No, no. If I was at all useful...yes, then spread my praises among the elementary school children!”

I'm glad to see he hasn't changed, she thought with a noticeably weak laugh.

I need to rethink some things, she decided. She felt she was taking too many things onto herself and making it all too complicated.

It was true she had a lot of information, but she could not just accept it all. How was she supposed to go through it all and process it?

Me: “Hey.”

“What?”

Me: “I hope you can start grinning before long.”

...Idiot.

Don't worry about me at times like this. Honestly.

“I need to cool my head a little.”

She stood up on a rock by the pond's edge and tossed Tsukinowa to the Aoi Sister. “Oh, dear,” said the girl as she caught the Mouse. “Ah,” said Asama and the others, but Masazumi ignored them.

“Oh, to hell with it.”

The most troublesome thing of all might be me, she thought as she collapsed back into the nighttime water.

She felt the splash and tenseness of the water’s surface on her back, a chill soaked into her hair and clothes, and the sound came last of all.

There were two moons in the sky. Once they set and the sun rose, she had the special student general assembly.

She would be busy tomorrow.

“Milady, I see you ended up with quite a few souvenirs again.”

Two people walked through a half-constructed residential district in the pale shadows the scaffolding and bridge girders cast in the artificial lighting.

It was Ookubo and Kanou. Kanou was empty-handed, but Ookubo held a paper bag full of snacks.

Kanou looked to the paper bag that Ookubo held.

“You enjoyed yourself, didn’t you?”

“Yes, I did.”

Ookubo added a “hey” and looked around the area.

“They really started filling in the residential districts today.”

Residential wide blocks were stacked up here and there on the Ariake’s floor. They only had to be guided into the Musashi’s foundational structure along with the other blocks.

Kanou opened a sign frame and checked on them.

“Due to the incident today and the need to leave on a moment’s notice if danger arises, these are being prioritized over the armor and such. The wide blocks are being built overnight and they will begin to be added in tomorrow morning. Within twenty four hours, eighty percent of them will be in place.”

“There are a lot more gods of war moving around than normal. ...Maybe we should have had the 6th Special Duty Officer come back.”

“She would have been working through the night, so while it would have been good in the short term, I have determined it would likely have led to a loss in the long term.”

“I see.”

Ookubo nodded, said “hey” again, and came to a stop. They had reached the end of the wide block and arrived at the guard station gate at the entrance to the neighboring long block. There was a row of vending machines there.

“Would you like something to drink, milady? ...I can pay.”

“No need. I can pay every once in a while. ...Have you had any coffee, Kanou-kun?”

“Milady, I would prefer strawberry milk.”

“Kanou-kun, is that why you always go buy it yourself?”

With a small smile, Ookubo inserted a coin into the machine. She said “hey” yet again and started to say more, but Kanou cut her off.

“What is it you really want to say after saying ‘hey’, Ookubo-sama?”

“...That’s the great thing about you, Kanou-kun.”

She pressed the button, a paper bottle fell into the opening, and the drink filled it. She pulled it out, put on a lid, and repeated the process for a second drink.

“Here. I made mine the same.”

“Milady.”

“I know,” said Ookubo. “Do you think the world will change if I stop Musashi from fighting?”

“It will likely change from its current road map if that is what you mean. But if our road map is the foundation, then it will not change. You could say we will be bringing the world back on course.”

“Do you remember what my father said?”

“Judge,” said Kanou. “Opposing views taken up just because an opposing view is needed and opposing views borrowed from someone else are not true opposing views. After all, there is no true spirit of resistance in them.”

“Am I...resisting something here?”

“Tomorrow, you will-...” Kanou shook her head just as a clock sounded inside the Ariake.
“No, by now, it’s today.”

The calm tone of the bell rang twelve times. Unlit sign frames appeared around the ship and in the sky to inform people a new day had begun and that an ether supply instability experiment would be run at 3:00 AM.

Kanou held her paper cup in both hands and took a sip.

“This is best with extra milk, milady.”

“You’re a harsh critic, Kanou-kun.”

“Let us be picky, milady. If we can do that, then we will be resisting. And rather than opposition to our opponent, that will bring pride in ourselves.”

Kanou placed a hand on the paper bag Ookubo held.

“From what I heard...you took all of the prizes save the punishment game prize.”

“I thought it would be best not to hold back.”

“If you want people to support you, shouldn’t you try to do things for them?”

“I just thought what I wanted to do and what everything thought I would do happened to match up there. Although it’s possible I just wanted to think that.”

“Then,” said Kanou with a nod and a glance to the distant academy on the stern of Okutama.
“Have you finished taking a break now, milady?”

“Can I maybe continue taking a break until morning?”

Ookubo held up her paper cup.

“This could indeed use some extra milk.”

“I think you are already motivated enough, milady. ...That is my go-time drink.”

Kanou lowered her head as she continued.

“Judge. Tomorrow, let us do everything we can without taking any breaks, milady.”

Chapter 58: Distant Promoter

第五十八章

『遠方の発起人』



理由不明
由来不明
ただ意味はあるもの
配点 (未来)

It has no reason

It has no origin

It simply has meaning

Point Allocation (Future)

Morning comes early on the Musashi, thought Isa in the early morning light below the bridge in front of the academy.

“They really are running 24 hours a day. I’ve been working here since last night.”

“That’s true, Isa-kun.It’s only six in the morning and they’re already constructing, stacking, and adding in the residential wide blocks. It’s getting hard to find a spot for a hidden meeting.”

“It must be bad if you’re complaining, Anayama.”

“How were things last night?”

“Hm... That was about as much as we could have hoped for from some hurriedly thrown-together dolls. I had to make sure they wouldn’t interfere with the ether transmission within the Ariake, so the feedback was weak and they messed up more easily.”

“I see. If anything, they should be good for support, so that will be your job, okay? As for the route, combine #5 and #12 of what I sent you before and then add #7 in reverse on top of that.”

“Wow, that’s confusing. Can’t you just do it, Anayama?”

“My job is to provide a diversion or to assist your escape.”

Anayama’s presence looked around the area.

Isa responded by doing the same.

They were in front of Musashi Ariadust Academy on the stern of Okutama. There was a nature district more toward the bow and a road that led to port and starboard. Work was underway on that road.

“Setting up for the special student general assembly, hm?”

“Yeah, I never thought I’d be building food stands and setting up tents after infiltrating the Ariake. It’s just like being recruited to set up for a festival.”

“But this could be trouble.”

Anayama could not be seen, but his voice was plain as day.

“These stairs out front...and the bridge to the academy at the top. If they hold the special student general assembly on the bridge, an assassination won’t be easy.”

“That you would say that when you already know what route we’ll be using shows just how good you are at building excitement, Anayama.” True. But,” said Anayama as his presence viewed the surrounding food stands as they prepared to open. “Let’s enjoy this atmosphere a while before making our move. ...I didn’t think we would be taking action on such short notice, but the three nations and P.A. Oda were all too quick to act.”

“As usual, the smaller nation is pushed around by the bigger nations. But...”

Isa waved back as a light god of war carried the materials for a food stand from the port side transportation district.

“I hope we can sell our name a little bit here.”

“As do I.”

Anayama’s voice took a step away and there was some movement in the sky. The Ariake was closed up, but the air inside its tall dome had moved.

“They’ve removed the stealth. They must be planning to broadcast the special student general assembly outside. So...”

Large widescreen sign frames started appearing in places. They displayed the scenery outside, but the starboard ones showed something approaching above the Ariake in the western sky.

“That’s the diplomatic ship their Vice President is on. Once that lands and the Vice President arrives on the bridge here, they can begin checking over everything. They’re saying it won’t actually start until 13:00 though.”

“If that changes, we’ll correct for it and get started.” Anayama’s voice faced the diplomatic ship descending through the morning sky. “Assassinating a Musashi VIP. ...That should make for a wonderfully sensational story.”

The sky was clear, but not empty.

Novgorod, a giant floating city with a bowl-shaped base, was there. That city of the dead used spells to set up a light-blocking barrier on the sun side. The city slowly rotated, but it did not move from its spot in the sky.

Another shape slowly circled around the large floating city on the east. To help Novgorod float, it was surrounded by artificial water on the upper edge, but a ship moved through that thirty meter thick waterway.

The pleasure ship was slowly rowed along by sailor ghosts to fight the city's rotation.

Two people could be seen on the ship's rear terrace. Marfa the Mayoress sat on a bench and looked to the east and her butler accompanied her. The woman with long white hair and a black Russian-style uniform spoke without turning to face her butler.

"Toby. What do you think?"

The elderly butler nodded at having his name called. He opened a Far Eastern-style *sankt okno* and displayed a map of the Far East and an image of Musashi's Vice President and Representative Committee Head.

"It seems their Vice President has arrived. After a greeting, they will likely finish their preparations and begin their confrontation."

"You used to be a Far Eastern student, so do you find yourself missing the old days?"

"I am still a student here, so why would I? ...Excitement has remained in my heart to this very day."

Toby looked down.

Several shapes were visible far to the south. They were several black galleys.

"Shibata Katsuie's troops. ...They've been there since last night."

"They probably think we might do something. They have decent battle instincts. If Shibata is receiving advice from Maeda and Fuwa, they will predict what is to come and do whatever will give them the greatest advantage. It's interesting how they are both holding us in check and provoking us. ...The supply line set up behind them must be the Hashiba forces that have 'left' Shibata's forces. They intend to win this."

Marfa glanced over at Toby's face.

"That stoic expression is no fun."

“We stand atop the precipice yet yours is equally stoic, Lady Marfa.”

“Ha ha.” Marfa’s expression changed as a laugh escaped her lips. “I guess I should change my expression at least this much. But now that this is Nanao Castle, do you think Kagekatsu will really show up?”

“I will make no attempt to rid you of your troublesome worries, Lady Marfa.”

“Oh, come on. That man loves taking the blame. It’s not like what happened with me was his fault. As a woman, my past is nothing more than clothing I’ve stopped wearing.”

“But,” said Toby. “While I hesitate to say this, harming ourselves to lure someone here is not in very good taste.”

“It’s not in bad taste either. Besides, memories are made by things that make you happy and things that bring pain. I’m bad at being happy or making people happy. A mayor’s job is to save money, so it brings more pain than happiness. Although when you’re dead, you don’t care that much about warmth, flavor, or smell, so that does help. If my men and the city’s people feel the same, then Novgorod truly is a city of the past. ... You’re the same, aren’t you? Didn’t you come to this city because of pain?”

“The pain is not mine. ... I simply have some regrets concerning my students.”

“You were right about that. ... I hope they can accomplish at least a little.”

Toby nodded and Marfa looked away. She instead looked to the bow terrace. Two people sat at a table there.

One was a middle-aged swordsman wearing Far Eastern clothing. He had his back to her, bowed his head toward the other person, and started talking about something with plenty of gestures. He occasionally pulled a book, some kind of box, a stone, or other objects from the paper bag at his side and handed them to the other person.

That other person was a middle-aged man in a Tres Españan uniform dyed black. As he listened to the other man, he smiled and occasionally erased his expression to nod deeply.

Marfa narrowed her eyes toward them.

“A Far Eastern master swordsman and a politician who could become a flashpoint for Europe. ... To think I would see them meet here.”

“Does this make you happy, Lady Marfa?”

“Unfortunately, it only doubles the pain. I can make a good guess what P.A. Oda will say.

Once the swordsman has everything he can get, he'll be leaving, won't he? Make sure we're ready for that. Also..."

Marfa looked to the man in a black Tres Español uniform.

"Make sure we're ready for him too. Contact Sviet Rus's PR Committee and tell them we'll be hijacking their divine network to contact Musashi."

"Testament. ...Let's make quite the commotion."

"It would be nice if this could become a worldwide commotion. ...Oh, now I'm feeling happy."

She slowly moved her eyes.

She looked to the city hall in the center of Novgorod's city.

"Now, we'll probably be selling everything here. After all, my Novgorod, you are Russia's oldest city and greatest trade city."

The corner of her mouth rose.

"You at least need to love me."

Below the morning sky and above the white snow, a few pairs of eyes viewed the giant bowl floating in the distant sky.

Three people stood on the white plain of the vast Harmonic Territory: Maeda Toshiie, Sassa Narimasa, and Fuwa Mitsuharu.

First, Toshiie used a telescope spell to view the giant structure in the sky.

"You say Novgorod is acting oddly? It is true it's been moving a bit more southeast than before."

"Not just that. What looks like their PR Committee is out on the eastern edge."

"Maybe they're just curious about Musashi's special student general assembly."

"Probably." Toshiie nodded with a hand on his chin. "Novgorod had all its physical outer walls removed during the purge. They make up for it with spell defenses, but that makes it harder to receive external divine transmissions. But..."

He expanded the *lernen figur* of the view seen through the telescope spell and showed it to the other two. Fuwa and Narimasa checked the image.

“Novgorod’s western edge? I can’t see it with everything in the way.”

“Don’t look at Novgorod itself, Na-chan.”

“You mean the ships leaving Novgorod, right?” asked Fuwa.

“What?”

Narimasa frowned, so Fuwa lightly elbowed him in the side. She narrowed her eyes, opened an *insha kotob*, and displayed a map of Hokuriku and Europe.

“You could say Novgorod was the trade city on the eastern end of the Hanseatic League. Its trade with Europe either took the northern route along the coast of the Baltic Sea and to Spain or took the southern route along rivers to the Black Sea and to the Mediterranean. That’s received a lot of focus in the history recreation as well, so when Europe trades with the world nations in the Kantou, Oushuu, or Jouetsu regions, Novgorod acts as a major contact point, right?”

“Right,” confirmed Toshiie. “That’s what Ivan IV wanted bad enough to purge Novgorod and it’s why Novgorod tried to achieve independence.”

“In other words, those shops are European?”

“Oh, you actually figured it out, Na-chan? Last year, your mind would have refused to think about it, so did you have a change of heart during your field trip dropping transport ships on Magdeburg? Then do you want to go for another one? I’ll pay.”

“Shut up, you idiot. ...So what is this? What do these European ships mean?”

“Testament. Novgorod is on the front line right now. It might be neutral, but it’s still dangerous. And now that Musashi has started diplomacy, those trading at Novgorod were given a temporary evacuation recommendation, so they’re all leaving.”

But...

“There are trade fleets from two nations that aren’t leaving. In fact, they only just arrived.”

The telescope spell *lernen figur* displayed a fleet of white and navy blue and a fleet of black and gold. They both had European-style round bottoms, but...

“The black fleet is probably the one Tomoe Gozen sent out to stop Sakuma’s fleet from passing through northern M.H.R.R. We had lost track of it, but if they had business here, it and

the other fleet are troublesome indeed.”

“How so?”

“Didn’t we mention this before? They’re both nations that end up winners at the Peace of Westphalia,” explained Toshiie. “I can generally guess what they’re here for, but I think the black one will be troublesome even without taking Westphalia into consideration. If what Hashiba said before is true...”

He took a breath before continuing.

“Musashi is approaching the Genesis Project, albeit in an indirect fashion. ...Oh, look. Novgorod’s PR Committee is starting to move.”

Masazumi arrived at Musashi Ariadust Academy where the special student general assembly would be held.

Once the diplomatic ship landed at the Ariake, members of the Public Morals Committee had escorted her to a waiting room inside the academy. Naito, Naruze, and Naomasa of the Chancellor’s Officers as well as Asama and the Aoi Sister had gone elsewhere.

...And it sounded like Asama and the Aoi Sister had other business to attend to...

The Aoi Mother, manager of the Blue Thunder, had apparently called to them from the Ariake’s rooftop. Masazumi did not know what that was about, but it had been an urgent matter. That would not be a problem since Asama had set things up so they could use the divine network and chat as before, but...

“Not good.”

I’m getting distracted, realized Masazumi as she looked around.

The sky seemed very low.

Ariake’s distant ceiling looked flat from the bridge in front of the academy. She had once had another confrontation at that elevated location. She felt like that had been an awful experience from beginning to end, but how would it turn out this time?

“Oh, Masazumi. Good morning.”

Oriotorai walked up the stairs to the side of the entrance. The faculty room was on the first floor, so she had apparently chosen the route up from the first floor entranceway rather than using the stairs inside the school.

It had only been a day, but it felt like so long since she had seen her teacher. Oriotorai must have felt the same because she swept her eyes along Masazumi from head to toe as she approached.

“Good, you don’t look injured.”

“Judge. A lot happened yesterday, but I was surrounded by skilled people.”

“No, I got a divine mail from Naruze that said, ‘She couldn’t hold back anymore last night and suddenly dove into the diplomatic ship’s pond, so give her a warning.’ ”

Oriotorai laughed and placed a hand on Masazumi’s head with a smile.

“I like that kind of thing. Seriously.”

“Have you done that kind of thing before?”

Masazumi would not be surprised either way with this homeroom teacher. The very first time she had seen the woman, she had seemed like someone who had just decided to stop worrying about things.

“Hmm... Yeah, that’s happened to me. But in my case, I didn’t have a pond and I was living with some other people, so I ended up being a real nuisance. That’s why I’m jealous that you can live here and do that kind of thing.”

Masazumi had her doubts that was worth being jealous over, but...

...It is true my environment has changed dramatically since I lived in Mikawa.

If that difference was an enviable thing, then maybe Oriotorai sensed something similar when looking at her.

However...

“Sensei.”

“Hm? What is it?”

“Are you jealous of all the students?”

“You mean of your young age?”

Sanyou had just opened the entrance door and started to step out, but her smile vanished and she back-dashed right back inside.

“Ah! Mitsuki! You’re overreacting! I hadn’t said they were at peak marrying age yet!”

“Judge. Not that you would’ve brought up that topic while talking to me anyway.”

“Oh? But Masazumi, I think you could choose just about anyone you wanted. From both the boys and the girls.”

“Oh, c’mon. Marriage? There’s no room for that in my life.”

And...

“My father would scoff at the thought. He’d say it was too soon for a child who can’t even support herself to even think about it.”

Nobu-tan: “K-Koni-tan! Koni-tan! I did my best to bug the place and my Masazumi is talking about marriage! Wh-wh-wh-wh-what do I do!? If she suddenly brings someone home to meet me, can I shove a spear up his ass and stir him up like in the new show Archipelago Creator Izanagi!? M-my chest feels all tight like a chicken being strangled! It’s squeezing and squeezing!”

Koni-tan: “Someone! Someone send a chicken hotpot set and some ponzu to Honda-san’s house!”

“Yeah, your dad is pretty strict.”

Oriotorai smiled bitterly, but Masazumi felt reluctant to just agree with that. So she spoke up to change her image of her father at least a little.

“No, I think my father tries to be considerate about that kind of thing. Before, he invited me to the Child of the Sun: Alexthunder-Rx hero show on Tama. I rejected the offer since I’m far too old for that and I’m pretty sure it’s for boys anyway. ...I just think he has trouble putting the right amount of distance between us.”

“Oh, I think I’ll go see that show. The original show had a sad ending where he was covered in honey and sent back home.”

“He said he could get tickets to the show at any time, so I can get you one if you need it.”

“Oh!”

Oriotorai leaned back with a smile and a sudden thought came to Masazumi.

...She's really helping me relax.

Suddenly, a color appeared in the sky. It was a sign frame. Specifically, it was one for large universal divine transmissions. It displayed "Ariake" who spoke with her eyes barely opened as usual.

"Good day, everyone. This is 'Ariake' with an external divine transmission announcement. A divine transmission has arrived for me and I have determined it should be shared with those inside the Ariake. Please make your own judgments. Now..."

...It should be shared?

Masazumi wondering what this could be about as "Ariake" bowed and continued.

"This is from the Sviet Rus floating city which is known as Russia's oldest city."

Yes.

"This is from Novgorod. Over."

The video was full of static.

The image Masazumi saw was of a sunlit terrace. It was on the bow of a ship. A city could be seen on the left side of the background, so it was likely a pleasure ship on the water surrounding Novgorod

The static emphasized the outlines, the colors were pale and the light was bright and white.

A man stood on the terrace.

He was covered by too much shadow to see his face or hands well. The surfaces hit by the light were bright and blended into the floor in the background.

He was wearing a black uniform. It may have been a Tres Españan one. The extra long coat made it look something like a pastor's robe, but...

...Tres España is Catholic...

In that case, realized Masazumi.

A staticky man's voice slowly spoke.

“Testament. ...Allow me to make an initial greeting to Musashi’s Student Council and Chancellor’s Officers.”

He raised his right hand and looked at the cheat sheet in his left hand as he made his greeting.

“Konnichiwaaaaaa, people of the Far East!”

Wise Sister: “Flat Politician! You mustn’t find this funny! He needs to move at least three steps beyond that! Got that!?”

That isn’t funny!? thought Masazumi in silent shock, but the man had more to say.

“Are you feeling genkiiii?”

Asama: “I-I’m sorry, Kimi. I just laughed a little.”

Flat Vassal: “And shouldn’t he just use a translation spell divine protection instead of trying to speak Far Eastern?”

Then man cleared his throat and took a breath.

“I am the Prince of Orange, Chancellor and Student Council President of the Independent Holland Academy.”

Mitotsudaira heard the information coming from Ariake thanks to Asama, so she stopped reading the materials they had gathered for that evening’s meeting and she looked around.

She was in the room they had been given. It was the same waiting room as the night before. She was free to leave, but it was snowing outside. Mary and Horizon had gone to borrow the kitchen, so they were not here. Without anyone to speak to, Mitotsudaira shouted in her heart.

...Holland!?

“That’s one of the main nations at the Peace of Westphalia!”

The Peace of Westphalia, which ended the Thirty Years’ War, was said to be the world’s first international meeting and the resolution to many different problems had been planned there.

Holland’s independence was one of those.

Back when Great Chancellor Carlos V had been king of M.H.R.R. and Tres España, Holland had been a detached territory of Tres España, but due to the Reformation, it had started a war with Tres España as a Protestant nation and achieved independence while splitting with

Catholic Belgium.

“And their independence was finally recognized at the Peace of Westphalia...”

Making an ally of Holland would hold M.H.R.R. in check while also bringing Musashi closer to one of Westphalia’s winners.

...But why is Holland suddenly trying to approach Musashi!?

Masazumi held her breath and focused on the words coming from the sky.

Holland’s representative, the Prince of Orange, spoke as nothing more than a staticky figure.

“Winner of Musashi’s special student general assembly, I imagine you will be busy with the three nations meeting later on, but if at all possible, I would like you to come here. I have something I must tell you.”

Namely...

“What exactly is the solution to the Apocalypse known as the Genesis Project? You must learn the truth in an appropriate location. It is-...”

Just as the Prince of Orange said that, the video grew even more distorted with static. Horizontal waves ran through it.

“...death...”

And it vanished.

The image on the sign frame burst into shards of light. The image soon recovered with the words “Divine Transmission Lost” displayed, but the image was now of something other than the Prince of Orange.

There was some static, but the image was much clearer now.

“Hello, Musashi. This is Niwa Nagahide, P.A. Oda Secretary and #2 of the Five Great Peaks and Six Heavenly Demon Armies.”

The image was filled by a thinly smiling woman in a modified white P.A. Oda girl’s uniform.

Niwa was up in the sky.

She stood on the front deck of the Jurakudai, a diplomatic battleship, with two ghosts behind her.

One was Hashiba Hidetsugu (formerly Date Kojirou) and the other was Mogami's Komahime.

Niwa crossed her arms and held a hand out toward the filming team.

“Shibata has fired a warning shot at Novgorod, so I expect they'll quiet down now. Think of that summons from Holland as nothing more than a dream, Musashi. It's daytime, so it's the perfect time for a losing nation to wake up and view reality. And if you do forget your place and try to interfere with Novgorod...”

In that case...

“The Testament Union will command the history recreation of the Battle of Nanao Castle with Novgorod as the battlefield. And then we in P.A. Oda will join in for the following Battle of Tedorigawa.”

Niwa asked, “Are you listening?”

“As a losing nation at present, don't think you can gain anything here. ...Try that and you will lose what you could have avoided losing.”

The leader of the filming team used his arms to form a circle over his head and Niwa smiled.

“Ooooookay, perfect! Excellent work, everyone!”

“If you haven't had breakfast yet, just tell me! I've already arranged for catering, so we can all eat together on the deck.”

...You didn't cut the divine transmission!

Masazumi sighed as she watched Niwa and the P.A. Oda warriors start to harmoniously form a circle on the deck with the lunchboxes that were carried out to them.

“Oh, maybe they forgot they used a battery-powered model since they were filming on a ship,” commented Oriotorai while looking up at the screen. “Even if the shaking of the ship knocked out the main power, the battery could keep going.”

“C'mon, Lord Hidetsugu,” said Niwa. “Don't just stand there...although I guess there's no helping that. You didn't seem to have many regrets. In that case...c'mon, Lady Komahime! Quit looking so upset and start eating!”

“I-I don’t need food! Ghosts don’t get hungry!”

Masazumi realized something from those voices.

...So Komahime has a will of her own, but Hidetsugu doesn’t.

The video showed a girl wearing a combination of a P.A. Oda and Russian girl’s summer uniform. She seemed worried about the unmoving boy who resembled Masamune and she clearly had a will of her own.

...Does that mean her regrets were stronger?

Masazumi did not know, but after a while, the view of the video moved. The camera was being carried elsewhere to clean up. Then the sign frame blacked out for a moment and was replaced by “Ariake”.

“Did you all enjoy that? And now...”

She bowed.

“I believe I will begin the scheduled special student general assembly. Over.”

Masazumi responded to that by looking forward.

Below the long stairway before her, food stands and crowds were filling the second and third schoolyards and plazas on the left and right. However, two people were climbing the center stairs.

The girl with a red stole over her shoulders was Ookubo and the one in a summer uniform was Kanou.

Her opponent had arrived.

Masazumi noticed the other two were already looking up at her.

First, Kanou bowed.

“I will wait below as your bodyguard, milady.”

“Please do.”

Ookubo continued on without watching Kanou leave, so Masazumi returned her gaze.

“Okay, Sensei...”

She gathered strength in her stomach.

“Let’s get started. ...Let’s pave the way toward Westphalia once more.”

“In that case...”

Oriotorai raised her right hand as she spoke.

“Begin the confrontation!”

Chapter 59: Pair at the Peak

第五十九章

『天辺の双者』



向かい合って
示し合って
そこからがスタート
配点 (開始)

Only after facing each other

And explaining themselves

Does it start

Point Allocation (Beginning)

A wooden table and a tent were set up below the blue sky and atop a green hill.

Two women in summer uniforms sat in chairs below the tent while sipping at teacups.

One was Hexagone Française Student Council President Mouri Terumoto and the other was Vice Chancellor and Reine des Garous Turenne.

Maid automatons served them snacks and fruits as they viewed the *signe cadre* in front of them.

Terumoto rested her cheek on her hand and her elbow on the armrest.

“Hey, Reine des Garous... Who do you think’s gonna win, Musashi’s Vice President or their Representative Council Head?”

“Whichever one wins, it changes nothing for Hexagone Française. ...Anne ensured that Musashi has a friendly relationship with Hexagone Française. That decision was made as a nation. Even if their representative changes, they can’t go back on that or risk losing all trustworthiness as a nation.”

“In that case... Oh, Mouri-01, get me some barley tea. The chilled stuff.”

“Testament. Chilled barley, right?”

“That’s not quite the same thing, but as long as you understand what I meant. ...Anyway, Reine des Garous.” Terumoto took a breath. “Did you put it that way because you think their Vice President is going to lose?”

“Normally thinking, that would be a ‘testament’. Now, this is a discovery I made eavesdropping on my daughter’s divine transmissions, but...it seems Musashi’s Vice President likes to solve every problem with war.”

“Why did Anne think we should try to get along with a nation like that?”

“No.” The Reine des Garous shook her head with her eyebrows a little raised. “I only discovered this recently and Anne was not a god, so I don’t think we can blame her for this! But now that I think about it, that Vice President might have given herself that flat chest according to the Amazon logic of making it easier to fire a bow...”

“Musashi’s main cannon has giant breasts and they generally use spell bowstrings these days, so I doubt that had anything to do with it.”

“Perhaps not.” The Reine des Garous did not argue any further and she crossed her legs in her chair. “But after their loss, their Vice President is going to be fighting a defensive battle. Debate confrontations like this are settled by out-arguing your opponent. ...Do you understand?”

“Their Vice President can be criticized for their loss and everything in the past related to that, but there’s nothing to criticize their Representative Council Head for since she’s only talking about the future. And if she is criticized for her future plans, she can sidestep it by saying she’ll ‘do something about it’. ...Oh, here it comes.”

Terumoto looked over to see Mouri-03 running out with a teacup balanced on her head. The automaton made a light spin and took a step to negate her momentum. When she spread her arms and came to a stop, the Reine des Garous smiled and applauded.

“Very good. And that was without any gravitational control, wasn’t it?”

“Ohhh, wow! You noticed right away, did you? Well, you are the Reine des Garous. Oh, Terumoto, here’s your chilled barley.”

Terumoto nodded and took a sip from the teacup while looking at the report from Musashi on her *signe cadre*.

She immediately spat it out and brushed off what had gotten on her hand.

“Y-you idiot! Is this chilled barley broth!?”

“Eh? Isn’t that what my big sister told me to bring you? ...Huh? Henri, Armand, why are you leaving your bodyguard posts? Huh, huh? Henri, where are you carrying me off to? Hey? Heyyy?”

As Mouri-03 was taken away, Mouri-02 carried in the proper drink.

She wore a short-sleeved summer uniform and an armband that said “Secretary”.

“I also applied to have Mouri-01 promoted to Vice President... That just leaves Treasurer.”

The sound of breaking dishes came from behind Terumoto. The two of them looked over and saw Mouri-01 smiling in front of a long table piled up with dishes and snacks. Behind it, a maid automaton with glasses was gathering up the fallen plates as the others helped out. She repeated “I’m sorry, I’m sorry” over and over, so the Reine des Garous spoke up.

“You have an interesting girl there.”

“What do you mean by that?”

The Reine des Garous did not answer. She simply smiled even more and looked to the east.

“Hashiba is spending their time building up K.P.A. Italia from within. ...The current question is whether they will go for a bloodless surrender with the flooding attack on Mouri.”

“And until then, we all focus on Musashi. What do you think?”

“On a personal level, I hope Musashi’s Vice President wins and they interfere in the world even more.”

“Because your daughter’s there?”

“My daughter is a knight who serves her king. She is not a princess who can speak with the world.”

“Hah. So you want Musashi’s king to interfere with the world so your daughter can head out into the world at large? Not everything’s about your daughter, you know? ...Not that I don’t understand how you feel.”

Terumoto laughed and the Reine des Garous narrowed her eyes and spoke.

“Musashi’s king is an interesting child too. He’s quite gentle, he says he’s going to be a king, and he can work up all the skilled people around him. But...”

But...

“He’s probably starting to think about what it means to ‘become’ a king rather than ‘making someone’ a king. ...In other words, he’s surrounded himself with people who want to make him king, but he’s still trying to ‘become’ king himself. I wonder what method he will choose to do that.”

“You view him pretty highly.”

“Well, he has made a lot of trouble for me recently.”

The Reine des Garous pulled an envelope from her cleavage and held it up so Terumoto

could see.

“This is Carlos V’s memo that my daughter received from Rudolf II. It’s encrypted, though. ... When exchanging some information with Tomoe Gozen yesterday, I made extra certain that we could decipher it.”

She laughed and placed a hand on her cheek. The *signe cadre* in front of her showed images of Musashi’s Vice President and Representative Council Head as well as some introductory text on both.

Musashi Vice President Honda Masazumi – Flat Chest Category

Goals: Retrieving the Logismoi Oplo and stopping the Apocalypse via world domination, and peace.

Musashi Representative Council Head Ookubo Tadachika – Average Chest Category

Goals: Carrying out Hashiba’s history recreation without going to war and obtaining a peaceful rule of the Far East based in the Testament descriptions.

“I see some cruelty mixed in there, but their Vice President isn’t going to have an easy time here.”

“True.” The Reine des Garous’s smile deepened and she fanned herself with the memo she held. “But my daughter obtained this, so I would like for it to be her king and his companions I send the results back to. So...”

So...

“I hope this ends up being exciting.”

In England...

“Now, then.”

Queen Elizabeth sat on her throne in the main hall and displayed a sign frame by her hand.

In Tres España...

“I wonder what will happen here.”

Segundo held up a *cadena firma* in the room that had become a living room for the Student Council and Chancellor’s Officers.

In Northern M.H.R.R....

“Which one will win?”

Tomoe Gozen crossed her arms before a *lernen figur* atop an aerial ship floating above a forest.

In Hexagone Française...

“Or maybe I should ask which one’ll lose.”

Terumoto rested her cheek in her hand in front of her *signe cadre* below the hilltop tent.

In K.P.A. Italia, Current Pope Olimpia sat up in a bed lined with toys.

In M.H.R.R., Hashiba and Matthias resupplied their fleet in a small city.

In Date, Mogami, Sviet Rus, and many other nations, the event was viewed by the representatives, their men, and the common people.

“What’s going to happen?”

The various styles of sign frame displayed two girls: Musashi Vice President Honda Masazumi and Representative Council Head Ookubo Tadachika. Musashi’s PR Committee placed some text below them on the screen:

“A Shocking Turn of Events is Coming...!!”

Just as everyone was wondering “Is it?”, Musashi’s Vice President raised her right forearm and spoke.

“Let me say one thing up front: We will *not* be going to war this time. I am a pacifist.”

Mal-Ga: “That’s just playing dirty. Leave it to the politician to play dirty. She just set up her defenses in advance.”

Asama: “Does it really count if it’s meant to defend against herself?”

Smoking Girl: “I’m down in the engine division right now and everyone just got an ‘eh?’ look on their face.”

Vice President: “Sh-shut up! I had no choice! If I didn’t do this, I might end up heading in that direction! And don’t call it admitting defeat right off the bat. ...This is like a prostration!

It's a strategy that lets you win by admitting defeat!"

Marube-ya: "An amateur is going to talk about prostrations in front of the experts? This is too painful to watch."

Worshiper: "Um, is it just me, or are we letting our awful sides out from the very beginning this time?"

"Hold on."

A sudden reaction came from atop the academy bridge.

It was Ookubo. She cleared her throat, raised her right forearm, and spoke with her eyebrows lying flat.

"The Chancellor's Officers and Student Council have given world domination as the method with which they will stop the Apocalypse and retrieve the Logismoi Oplo. And now you're calling yourself a pacifist? Aren't you already contradicting yourself?"

"Let me make one thing clear up front: there is no contradiction there." Masazumi filled her lungs with air. "Let's lay out our positions, Ookubo."

"Judge. May I go first?"

"Judge," agreed Masazumi.

Then the two of them took a step toward the bow end of the bridge.

They looked down below.

They saw the roads and parks filled with food stands and carriages and the crowds of people filling the streets and plazas. In the distance, they could see the smoke from food stands and hear the beating of drums from not just Okutama but the Ariake's floor and the stern of Takao, Oume, and Musashino.

As they looked out across all that, Masazumi exhaled and Ookubo inhaled.

"As organizer of this special student general assembly, I, Ookubo Tadachika, will now announce my objective!" Ookubo raised her voice. "Our objective is to bring peace to Musashi and the Far East. Our goal is to return the Far East to its pre-Battle of Mikawa state and to maintain our peace by leaving the history recreation to the other nations!"

"We will do this in three ways:

“First, negotiate an alliance with Hashiba and P.A. Oda and then advance the history recreation according to the Testament Union’s instructions.

“Second, store the Musashi in the Ariake and use its presence to deter an attack on the Far East.

“And third...”

She took a step forward.

“Reject all combat and achieve our goals such as retrieving the Logismo Oplo through peaceful discussions at the Peace of Westphalia!”

Ookubo watched the reaction.

The people below were looking up at her. But the overwhelming majority was silent or simply acknowledging her words, so it was hard to say they were fired up.

...It’s all about the speed of comprehension.

They might be able to understand what she had said if they could read through it word by word, but their comprehension could not keep up when it was explained verbally. It was possible to say it more simply by abbreviating it and stating it in different ways, but her goal here was to argue her side as accurately as possible. Abbreviating her argument could lead to a failure to adequately explain herself. So...

“Sensei.”

“Sure thing.”

She did not look back, but she heard Oriotorai typing on a sign frame keyboard. Soon, the information from the PR Committee appeared in front of the people.

●Ookubo: Anti-War Side

Objective: Without fighting, return the Far East to its pre-Battle of Mikawa state and reacquire peace.

1: Negotiate an alliance with Hashiba and P.A. Oda and then advance the history recreation according to the Testament Union’s instructions.

2: Store the Musashi in the Ariake and use its presence to deter an attack on the Far East.

3: Reject all combat and achieve our goals such as retrieving the Logismoi Oplo through peaceful discussions at the Peace of Westphalia.

“I just have to record things like this so everyone can look back over it and double check what you said, right? ...And, Masazumi.”

“Judge. What is it, sensei?”

The Vice President looked back and Oriotorai spoke.

“If you have any counterarguments, I’ll add them to the side of these. ...And vice-versa, of course.”

“Judge.” Ookubo nodded. “In other words, we will make counterarguments for each other’s objectives and victory will be determined by whether or not we can rebut those counterarguments.”

“Exactly. Depending on what the counterarguments are, you might be able to get by with just changing your interpretation of the objective, so I’ll allow that.”

That’s good to hear, thought Ookubo, so she said “judge” and looked to the Vice President.

“Is there anything you would like to try, Vice President?”

“Well,” said Masazumi with a sigh.

When she breathed back in, she felt like strength filled her along with the oxygen.

This was the front line. It was the front line of the debate. And since she knew she was going to be on the defensive here, she wanted to keep herself light and nimble.

So she exhaled and relaxed her shoulders. Tsukinowa did the same. *Good, good. You’re so cute.* She rubbed her cheek against the Mouse thrice. All of that counted as a single action. And...

“Are you jealous, Ookubo?”

“No, not really.”

Her opponent was being difficult, but Masazumi still relaxed her body and spoke.

“Before saying anything about the Representative Committee Head’s opinion, I would like to lay out our policy.”

She turned her body to face the people she could see down the stairs.

“This is our plan. Our objectives are the retrieval of the Logismo Oplo and stopping the Apocalypse. To do that...”

She raised three fingers.

“First, we must gain the cooperation of the other nations and we must stop P.A. Oda and Hashiba who are bringing their military campaign to those nations.

“Second, we must advance a global compliance with the history recreation while stopping any unnecessary battles. To do that, we must increase the Musashi’s ability to fight and cooperate with the other nations. And...”

And...

“Third, we must request the end of the Far East’s provisional rule at the Peace of Westphalia. After that, we can set up Matsudaira’s rule and advance the survival and expansion of the world. ...That is our plan.”

Masazumi heard Oriotorai type at her sign frame with a comment of “I see”.

Then the first line from the PR Committee was displayed.

●**Vice President: Pro-War Side**

“S-sensei! There’s been a misunderstanding! I didn’t say that!”

“Ohh, would ‘War Lover Side’ fit better?”

Ookubo looked a little disturbed, but Masazumi tried to figure out what to do about this. And...

...Yeah, that’s it.

A term came to mind, so she gave it.

“Let’s go with ‘Resistance Side’.”

“This would probably get to be a real pain if I asked what you’re resisting against, so I guess I can just go with that.”

●**Vice President: Resistance Side**

Objective: Take back the Far East's status and achieve peace by retrieving the Logismo Oplo and stopping the Apocalypse.

1: Stop Hashiba.

2: Give the Musashi the ability to fight and use that power to cooperate with the other nations.

3: End the provisional rule and request the expansion of the world at the Peace of Westphalia.

Masazumi had a thought as she looked at the displayed information.

...I'm really being optimistic here. ...Especially with #3.

She had also stated their intent to end the provisional rule back in England, but the weight of its meaning was painfully clear when it was displayed so plainly like this. But Musashi supporting the other nations' heading out from the Far East did not contradict the end of the provisional rule. So she agreed with what Oriotorai had written up.

"That's good enough, sensei. Please continue."

"She's really moving forward here. ...She's even talking about what to do about the world after their world domination."

The Reine des Garous spoke in the hilltop tent while watching Mouri-01 making a café au lait.

Terumoto replied from across the table.

"Isn't she moving too far forward? Expanding the world means to develop the harsh lands outside the Far East, right? How many of the other nations are even going to agree to that?"

"We plan to, don't we? And...we've seen a real difference between the two of them now. Musashi's Representative Committee Head wants to thoroughly avoid all conflict and thinks they just have to achieve Matsudaira's rule as per the Testament descriptions. In other words, she wants to bring back the Far East as it was before the Battle of Mikawa.

"Meanwhile, Musashi's Vice President wants to continue on without fearing conflict and to establish Matsudaira's rule for real. To put it another way, she wants to use the Battle of Mikawa to reorganize the Far East."

The Reine des Garous smiled and thanked Mouri-01 as the automaton served her the cup of

café au lait.

“As an automaton, which one do you predict will win?”

“I can determine that their Vice President is at an overwhelming disadvantage. She is suggesting that they return the Far East’s rights to what they were before the Harmonic Unification War and that they make the Far East independent. However, there are many problems with that. Realistic problems. Just look.”

Mouri-01 pointed at the *signe cadre*.

“The realistic side which wishes for the pre-Mikawa status quo will use that to attack.”

In front of Mouri-01’s pointing finger, Musashi’s Representative Committee Head took a step forward.

She pushed up her glasses and opened a sign frame which displayed the Vice President’s policy list.

“Now, may I begin? My fundamental policy is to return the Far East to its pre-Battle of Mikawa state and to make everything how it once was, so I have some advice for the Vice President who wishes for something new.”

That is...

“I will provide advice that rejects the Vice President’s three policies in order and I will finish by rejecting her overall objective. ...I will be doing this all at once.”

Chapter 60: Marcher at the Appointed Time

第六十章

『刻限の進軍者』



If you kind of understand it

But not really understand it

Can you kind of understand it

But really understand it?

Point Allocation (Requires Effort)

“Then let’s get started.”

Ookubo stepped forward and spoke to everyone. *I can’t let up*, she told herself.

“How about it, everyone? Do you not see any problems with the Vice President’s goal and three suggestions?”

No one answered. They only tilted their heads. So Ookubo turned toward the Vice President.

“Listen. Stopping the Apocalypse, freeing us from provisional rule, and asking the other nations to develop the land are all ideal visions of the future. But they raise several questions as well. ...Do you really think the other nations will agree to free us from provisional rule and to develop that harsh land? If you’re bringing this up without any way of convincing them to agree, then you’re deceiving us all.”

Ookubo succinctly stated her conclusion.

“So it isn’t possible.”

“How can you know that?”

“First of all, you claim you’re going to ‘stop Hashiba’, but we already lost.”

Ookubo wrote up a complaint on the sign frame showing the Vice President’s suggestions.

1: Stop Hashiba.

X: We already lost to Hashiba.

She tapped the sign frame as she said more.

“You need to look at reality when you decide on your policies. ...Musashi has already lost,

so how are we supposed to stop Hashiba? You have no proof we can do anything,” said Ookubo. “Listen. Policies with no basis in reality are dangerous. And I have some complaints about your second policy as well. You have no realistic basis for it either. Just look. You say you want to ‘give the Musashi the ability to fight and use that power to cooperate with the other nations’, but you can’t do that.”

After all...

“You have yet to visit all of the Far East.”

Ookubo did not overlook that the Vice President’s eyebrows rose a little. Whether that was surprise or something else, the girl had not expected this. So Ookubo continued along that line.

“You’re only partway through visiting the entire world, so you can’t possibly know how all the nations will react. So you claim we will ‘cooperate with the other nations’, but you don’t know whether they will even let us cooperate or if cooperation will lead to political bonds. It isn’t realistic. ...And so your idealistic ideas are already over. They’re nice ideals, but in reality ‘they might fail’. Can we really bet the future of our nation on that?”

Ookubo spread her arms toward the crowds and said “listen” again.

“Musashi and the Far East are on their last chance. After Mikawa and the Armada, the other nations had high hopes for us and you said a lot of clever things, right? But we couldn’t stand up to Hashiba and we lost. ...After betraying everyone’s expectations, how much value does Musashi even have anymore?”

Ookubo gestured toward the entirety of the Ariake and the Musashi’s eight ships inside.

“What were you thinking remodeling and arming the ship? You used a ton of your budget on that, didn’t you? That means you can’t do this again. If we fail this time, it’s all over. They’ll take everything from us and then the Logismoi Oplo and the Apocalypse will be the least of our worries. ...Are you really going to bet Musashi and the Far East on that?”

Ookubo added her complaints to the Vice President’s argument on the sign frame.

“Just look.”

2: Give the Musashi the ability to fight and use that power to cooperate with the other nations.

X: There is no guarantee the other nations will cooperate.

X: Musashi is on its last chance, so how can we take such a large gamble?

“That’s about it. It isn’t realistic. So...”

Ookubo sighed as she spoke.

“Let’s open our eyes to reality. ...And then return the Far East to its pre-Mikawa days.”

She’s chosen a pain-in-the-ass way of doing this, thought Masazumi.

Ookubo’s argument contained a misunderstanding that was likely intentional.

...If politics didn’t allow for idealistic ideas, you wouldn’t be able to have “goals” and “policies” in the first place...

Goals were only goals because they were incomplete. And a plan was created to make those incomplete goals a reality. It was the same in politics. Goals were what one wanted to do with the nation and the policies were the plan to achieve the goals.

Deciding on the goals and policies was a politician’s role.

Azuma: “Um, I just had a thought. ...Is it really not possible to only do things that you know you can accomplish, just like Ookubo-san is suggesting?”

Mal-Ga: “You’re being naïve. You need to focus on Masazumi’s deeper thoughts. ...If we only do what’s guaranteed to work, it means we can’t go to war, right? And you need to remember that Masazumi became a politician because she wanted to go to war. Far Eastern politics will summon hell!”

Azuma: “Oh, I get it now! Sorry, Masazumi-kun, I didn’t understand your motivations properly!”

Vice President: “D-dammit! I won’t get mad. I won’t!”

“Hey, can I ask something?”

A crossdresser spoke up in the girls’ room.

This was the Sviet Rus waiting room for the girls. Light reflected off the snow filled the windows, so the room was bright white. Inside, Horizon, Mitotsudaira, Mary, and the crossdresser sat around the tea table. Tenzou stuck his head inside from the half-opened sliding door.

“Um, Toori-dono, this is the girls’ room...”

“What? But I’m a girl right now! And since I’m a diplomat, you’ve gotta call me Diploko! Don’t forget it! If you want to join us in here, you’ve gotta become a girl too. Since you’re name’s Tenzou, we’ll call you Nzoko!”

“Wh-why go for a name that sounds like the general of an evil organization!?”

“Heh heh. I think Tenko sounds cute,” said Mary with a hand on her cheek.

Next to Mary, Horizon drank all her tea at once and held her cup out toward Mary to ask for more. Then she glanced over at the idiot.

“Mitotsudaira-sama, prepare your silver chains. ...Now, ask your question.”

“Y-you just had to set up your defenses like crazy before asking, didn’t you?”

But the crossdresser scratched his head in thought and asked his question.

“What did Tenzou mean when he was mumbling something like, ‘We’d in twubble as a nyation if we could only do what we knew would work’?”

“I didn’t say that! I didn’t!”

“Heh heh. It’s cute how you sometimes misspeak like that, Master Tenzou.”

“I did say that! I did!”

Mitotsudaira was a little concerned by how things were going, but then the crossdresser asked another question.

“Did Seijun mess up?”

“What makes you think that?”

“Well.” He nodded and tilted his head. “She doesn’t seem very excited. And while I’m the President, I don’t really get a lot of this.”

Yeah.

“If I understood more of it, I’d be able to say something or tease her.”

Oh, dear,” thought Mitotsudaira.

...My king is doing this in his own way...

He was still relying on Masazumi, but he was wondering what he could do as king. Of course, the greatest help a king could provide was his support, but...

“You’re worried as an individual who holds the position of king, aren’t you?”

“Hmm, maybe that’s it,” said the crossdresser. “I’m worried about all of you: Nate, Horizon, sis, Asama, and everyone else. ...Oh, and Tenzou, you’re here too, aren’t you?”

“Wh-why was I just tacked onto the end there!?”

Mitotsudaira thought to herself as she helped Mary calm down the ninja.

...What brought on this change?

No, she knew the answer: losing that battle. Before that, he must have spoken with her mother about what it meant to be a king. And in England, he had spoken with Horizon about their future plans.

“My king.”

She had a lot on her mind, but she had a feeling that everything was fine for the time being. So she spoke to help her ruler relax.

“Masazumi has not messed up. The Representative Committee Head is simply that good.”

“What do you mean? I mean, from a specs standpoint, a glasses committee head does sound pretty skilled.”

Horizon snapped her fingers, so Mitotsudaira pulled him over with the silver chains, smiled, and spoke.

“Listen.”

“Oh!? Oh!? You wanna try this!? Just so you know, I’m not wearing a supporter or any underwear below this! Listen up, silver chain! Get close and you’ll be wrapping around my lack of a supporter! Are you sure you want that!?”

“Y-you are the worst!!”

The silver chain rose up in disgust and turned the tight arm toward Mitotsudaira. She stroked it to calm it while Horizon glared at the crossdresser to quiet him down.

“Now, Mitotsudaira-sama, go ahead. If need be, you can only coil it around his neck.”

“Judge. ...Listen. The Representative Committee Head has negatively repainted ‘goals’ and ‘policies’ as something you can’t be sure will work out.”

“But if you don’t know if it’ll work out, wouldn’t it be better not to do it?”

The 1st Special Duty Officer raised his hand from over by the door and answered the crossdresser’s question.

“Listen, Toori-dono. Think of it like this: Can a bakery that never introduces any new products ever expand?”

“So it’s like a porn game maker that only produces remakes?”

The 1st Special Duty Officer nearly answered but then decided against it. He slowly looked over at Mary and confirmed that she had not understood the idiot’s question and was tilting her head.

“Hm... I have no idea what you mean, Toori-dono.”

“There’s a lot I want to say about that, but setting aside remakes, it’s true you got yourself a wife without broadening your horizons beyond the one genre... Aren’t you going to be in trouble without some more variations in genre, like neglect, honey, in the bath, or two sisters at the same time?”

“Hm? Are you two talking about a kind of game, Master Tenzou?”

“Eh!? ...Y-yes, a game! It’s a kind of game! A fun kind of game!”

“Oh, my. Even if I don’t understand, I’ll do what I can to help when you’re researching the topic. It is a wife’s duty to help out her husband.”

The 1st Special Duty Officer said nothing and simply gave the idiot a trembling thumbs up.

“Yes, yes.” Horizon nodded twice and turned toward Mitotsudaira. “As a nation, it is true you will not develop if you keep everything the same.”

“Really?” asked the crossdresser. “Just so you know, there are standard things that every bakery needs to have.”

“Yes, but the Blue Thunder serves light meals, pickled vegetables, and snacks as well.”

Even Horizon likely had a vague understanding that the Blue Thunder’s position as a bakery/café was somewhat iffy.

“Listen, Chancellor. ...Things might seem stable while you always make the same bread and

it's true that will provide a steady income."

It would have been easier to have Heidi explain this, but Mitotsudaira was working to expand her perfume brand, so she used her knowledge from that.

"But, Chancellor? ...Even if you don't change, everyone else will. If you don't follow those changes, you won't fit in with them and you will become outdated."

"What's wrong with that?"

"If other places are making bread according to the current trends, do you really think an outdated bakery will sell any bread? ...Even if you lower your prices to draw in some customers, your income will shrink and even that might not be enough to keep people from leaving for the other bakeries."

"Oh, I get it," said the crossdresser.

"Neither Blue Thunder has been making things exactly the same forever," added Horizon. "After all, you search out the cheapest and best tasting flour and other ingredients from the distributor, you buy a new oven when need be, update the one you have, or even change manufacturer. The final product looks the same, but it is constantly changing."

"Then...why would anyone accept what that glasses committee head is saying? Her policies won't lead to any development, right? So why would she say that?"

"Toori-sama."

Horizon brought the teacup to her mouth, took a sip of tea, and set it down.

"Sorry. That is a little too hot. Heh. It's about the temperature of Tenzou-sama and Mary-sama."

"D-dammit! You got me!" shouted the crossdresser. "I don't know how, but that had to be at my expense!!"

Horizon gave a triumphant thumbs up, but Mitotsudaira steered them back on topic.

"It is true that people will accept the Representative Committee Head's suggestion that we shouldn't develop. Isn't that right, Horizon?"

"Judge. It is a simple matter. Before, Toori-sama asked why old things are bad, didn't he? This is the same. ...Most people prefer what is old and stable. Even if the new things are better, they wonder why we have to change because they will miss the old way of doing things."

“Of course,” added Mitotsudaira. “Nostalgia isn’t enough for politics. The Representative Committee Head likely has some way of doing things the old way while still updating it for modern times. Using the bakery analogy, it’s like using a new oven but still following the old recipe.”

I see, thought Masazumi.

Winning a debate like this generally meant to crush your opponent’s argument while keeping your own argument alive.

But Ookubo had gone a step beyond that.

...Is she focusing on public opinion?

Returning the Far East to its pre-Mikawa state.

That meant returning to an age of being entirely under the Testament Union’s rule. All of their battles and negotiations thus far would be rendered meaningless and they would obediently accept the Testament Union’s rule.

But, thought Masazumi. The Far East is still under provisional rule.

That was undoubtedly true. While Musashi was on the path to freedom from the provisional rule, the other nations’ power over them had not weakened. At Mikawa, they had set up defenses to prevent attacks on the reservations around the Far East, but they would have been in real danger otherwise. So what was Ookubo saying?

...Referring to a pre-Mikawa state implies that we’re free of their rule now.

Of course, Masazumi was saying they needed to request freedom from the provisional rule. But...

Vice President: “Perhaps people can picture scenes from the past more vividly than a suggested future.”

“Probably,” replied Naito.

Gold Mar: “But why is she stating things in a way that works against her? She’s making it sound like we’ve freed them and she’s going to bring them back to an age of bondage. Doesn’t that hurt her case?”

Vice President: “Annoyingly enough, stating things like that is actually incredibly effective.”

Masazumi did not even need to explain because Ookubo pointed at her with her left hand and opened her mouth.

“Let me add one thing about our objective of bringing the Far East back to a pre-Battle of Mikawa state.”

...Here it comes.

Masazumi knew what she was going to say, but she let her say it.

She decided it was better to let her opponent state her full argument than to try to silence her.

So Masazumi listened to Ookubo who turned toward the crowd and extended her right hand.

“Returning to a pre-Battle of Mikawa state sounds like placing ourselves back under provisional rule, doesn’t it? But think about this: have we actually escaped that rule since Mikawa? Has our environment dramatically improved in the last three months? ...It hasn’t, has it!? It’s been battle, tension from the possibility of more battle, exhaustion, damage, and defeat! We’re supposed to be gaining our freedom, but we haven’t achieved a single thing that brings us closer to that! We’ve worked at it for three months and gained nothing but defeat! So now that we’re on our final chance, doesn’t this seem like a good time to call it quits!? We still have the Musashi, so we can still go back to the way things were. So...”

Ookubo spread her arms and shouted to the crowd below.

“If we had gained anything but exhaustion and loss since Mikawa, I would listen. But we haven’t and this is our chance to return to the old age of peace. I’m willing to say it: we may not have been free, but we had peace. I’m saying we should return to the cramped but peaceful Musashi and Far East that we have lost since Mikawa. So...”

She displayed the third policy.

“ ‘End the provisional rule and request the expansion of the world at the Peace of Westphalia.’ ...That’s quite the dream, isn’t it? But as I said before, we have no proof the other nations will cooperate, so it’s an empty argument. Also...”

Also...

“As I said, there hasn’t been a single sign of freeing ourselves over the past three months! And if we don’t know whether or not the other nations will cooperate, can we really end the provisional rule!?”

She displayed her complaints alongside the policy.

3: End the provisional rule and request the expansion of the world at the Peace of Westphalia.

X: Just as with 2, there is no guarantee the other nations will cooperate.

X: There is no sign of the rule ending, so can we really do that?

“How about that?” said Ookubo. “What realistic policies do you even have, Vice President!?”

“You have a very strict underclassman there.”

As they walked between walls of snow, Adele listened to Yoshiaki and turned to Yoshiyasu.

Yoshiyasu tilted her head at Adele’s smile.

“I’m not all that strict. This much is normal for a Student Council President.”

Strict... said Adele in her heart.

They were walking below Mogami’s Yamagata Castle. Yamagata Castle had entered a land port for aerial ships, but the surrounding castle town was also built down into the ground.

The pit a hundred meters deep and fifty meters wide seemed to stretch on forever as a giant atrium. The layered city was lined up side by side on the inner cliff walls like the teeth of a comb.

Starting at about thirty meters belowground, multilayer wooden wide blocks were lined up.

“Each block has between fifteen and twenty stories. A block can be removed for a farm, so it is a lot like the Musashi. But...”

Adele walked with Yoshiaki at about five stories down.

There was a passageway with deep eaves and a rope bridge connected it to the vertical block on the other side.

Walls of snow stood at the bottom of the pit below. They had built up and accumulated during the winter and lots of running water could be heard from the bottom of the snow.

“We accumulate ether fuel by converting that flowing water into power. Although about half of it is used to preserve the paddy fields in the various blocks.”

It was true that paddy fields were visible within the majority of the blocks. The sunlight was reproduced by spells and the rice plants were dense and verdant. And down in the underground areas...

“Are all those sealed areas filled with paddies?”

“If we open them based on how the snow falls, it changes the timing of the harvest, which is convenient.”

The other people on the path readily passed by and greeted Yoshiaki. Adele watched that and turned to Yoshiyasu who was staring at the multilayer houses.

Then Yoshiaki spoke to that girl viewing her city.

“What do you think of Mogami?”

“It’s a nice city. The use of thermal heating seems to be effective. And while you have decent circulation of goods, you also make use of the inconveniences. You dig into the accumulated winter snow to create passageways to the other side, don’t you?”

“Testament. The snow passageways gradually sink as the snow melts, but everyone celebrates it as it means spring is coming. But...”

As Yoshiaki continued on ahead, she asked a question.

“Can Musashi celebrate and purify that sort of inconvenience?”

“Eh? Celebrate...and purify?”

“Testament. In Shinto, the inconveniences of nature are celebrated as divisions between and turning points of the seasons. So rather than inconveniences, you accept them as ‘signs’ and keep them pure. If you accepted them as inconveniences, you would have to get rid of them which would not be easy.”

So...

“What is it that Musashi is experiencing right now? Is it an inconvenience you can celebrate? Or is it an inconvenience you view as an obstacle?”

Hearing that, Adele opened a sign frame and displayed the current state of Masazumi’s argument as relayed by Asama.

●**Vice President: Resistance Side**

Objective: Take back the Far East’s status and achieve peace by retrieving the

Logismoi Oplo and stopping the Apocalypse.

1: Stop Hashiba.

X: We already lost to Hashiba.

2: Give the Musashi the ability to fight and use that power to cooperate with the other nations.

X: There is no guarantee the other nations will cooperate.

X: Musashi is on its last chance, so how can we take such a large gamble?

3: End the provisional rule and request the expansion of the world at the Peace of Westphalia.

X: Just as with 2, there is no guarantee the other nations will cooperate.

X: There is no sign of the rule ending, so can we really do that?

Wow, thought Adele. *She's going all out here.*

Mal-Ga: “This is getting tricky. Everyone would live their lives without thinking about any of this if no one brought it up, but once you put it to words and make them think about it, they'll start saying it needs to be fixed. Even though it mostly doesn't matter and can be left with the politicians.”

Flat Vassal: “So this really is bad?”

“It is,” sent Naruze. And...

Mal-Ga: “Most people will just have to trust what they hear in this debate. Even if both sides list up their claims, people don't want to think about it too much. They'd prefer to have someone else explain why it's wrong and then they can just confirm that part for themselves. So all the Representative Committee Head has to do is-...”

Righteousness: “Add as many Xs to her opponent's claims as she can? The people who want all this explained to them will think it's wrong if it has an X next to it.”

“Yoshiyasu.”

Yoshiaki stopped walking.

She placed her hands on the railing by the pit and smiled with half her face turned toward Yoshiyasu.

“This might be a sudden question, but do you think anyone is perfect?”

“I know that the people who want to be perfect speak louder than everyone else. ...That’s what I was doing a month ago.”

“What about now?”

“I don’t know.”

Yoshiyasu placed her hands on the railing too, so Adele followed suit.

...*Oh.*

Looking down from the wooden railing, she saw a pit deeper than Musashi’s atrium parks. It may have been similar to the areas where all the blocks had been removed from the basic structure for remodeling. Above, below, and on the other side, she saw rows of houses and blocks with different functions. People walked along the passageways and rope bridges to support their lives and work. A closer look showed children playing despite how high up they were and they all waved or bowed when they noticed Yoshiaki.

Yoshiaki narrowed her eyes and waved back, but Yoshiyasu hung her head next to the woman.

“Yoshiaki...how can I end up like this?”

“Heh heh... You have Musashi, don’t you? How does it look to you?”

“Musashi looks the same as *this* to me,” said Yoshiyasu. “But I don’t think I could create this or Musashi.”

“And that’s why I can call you a fool. ...The previous two generations were too kind to you.”

“Wha-...!?”

Yoshiyasu’s head shot up in what Adele knew was preparation to protest.

...*Yeah, Yoshiyasu-san really loves her big brother and big sister!*

Yes! thought Adele with a mentally clenched fist, but then a straight line struck Yoshiyasu’s forehead.

It was Yoshiaki’s fan. It was closed and, as it was gently held out, it stopped Yoshiyasu from moving her forehead forward.

The girl’s initial movement was being held back. Only a slight bit of strength was needed when she had yet to gather her strength.

“Yoshiyasu,” said Yoshiaki with a smile. “The previous two generations were too kind to tell you that you were mistaken. And that is why you are half right...and half wrong.”

“Half...?”

“Yes. ...As a politician, you have thought too seriously about what creates a nation and what keeps it running. You are no match for Musashi’s Vice President or Representative Committee Head like that. Just watch.”

Yoshiaki swung and spread her fan to indicate the entire atrium.

“The debate on the Musashi will be very valuable for you.”

Ookubo swung an arm atop the bridge. She kept her body light, made a half spin, and let her red stole flutter.

The many people gathered in the road and plaza down below had stopped saying much. That was not surprising. On the list of debate points, The Vice President’s side was covered in Xs from Ookubo’s complaints.

She could tell everyone was looking at those Xs and at the two debaters. The number of Xs made them think the Vice President was “wrong”, so they were hesitating.

...I see.

So this is the viewpoint of a politician.

This was a special student general assembly. They were directly debating Musashi’s future as a nation, so it was worth hearing for the normal people as well as the students.

She had seen this from the crowd below three months before at Mikawa.

But she understood something now that she was on the top.

She could sense the presence of the people from here. Instead of the overlapping silhouettes continuing to the horizon when walking through the city on the same level as them, she viewed them from above and could see them all as individuals. Instead of all walking in the same direction, they each moved toward their own destination and did or said whatever they wanted. That was only within the narrow field of her vision, but that was exactly why she wanted to spread her arms to grasp it all.

She wanted to respond to this.

But she restrained herself. Instead of responding to the sensation she found here, she had to do what she came here to do.

“Listen.”

She opened her hand toward the people below and opened her mouth.

“I will add another complaint to the first policy of ‘stop Hashiba’. ...I want to have two Xs for each.”

She had no intention of holding back.

“You know what?” Ookubo walked left and right atop the bridge and swung her arm as if to keep time. “Listen. You’re forgetting something very important about stopping Hashiba. Hashiba’s temporary rule of the Far East is already established in the Testament descriptions. When the Vice President says she is going to stop Hashiba, she’s saying she won’t let Hashiba establish their rule and thus she will be defying the Testament. Can we really do that? So to put it simply...”

Ookubo added another X to the Vice President’s first policy.

1: Stop Hashiba.

X: We already lost to Hashiba.

X: Not allowing Hashiba’s rule means opposing the Testament.

“There you have it.”

Now she had two Xs for each. But...

...I’m not done yet.

She would not hold back. Her attack was still insufficient. For example, both #2 and #3 had “there is no guarantee the other nations will cooperate” listed. If they found out the other nations would cooperate, it would instantly erase two of her Xs.

So she started thinking.

2: Give the Musashi the ability to fight and use that power to cooperate with the other nations.

3: End the provisional rule and request the expansion of the world at the Peace of

Westphalia.

Between those two, which one could she better argue against with something other than “there is no guarantee the other nations will cooperate”?

...#2.

For #2, Musashi was *helping the other nations*.

For #3, Musashi was *asking the other nations for help*.

If actively interfering with the other nations and resolving their issues could be interpreted as “cooperation”...

...Then the cooperation for #2 can be pulled off with Musashi's actions alone.

Ookubo decided that the Vice President would definitely argue that point, so...

“Sensei, about ‘there is no guarantee the other nations will cooperate’ under #2 and #3. As far as I can tell, those are saying the same thing, so...”

“Wait.”

The Vice President called out to her while petting the anteater on her shoulder with her right hand.

“Do you debate by retracting your arguments to make new ones?”

She placed her left hand on her chest and looked straight at Ookubo.

“You made an argument you knew you would retract and now you're going to make your true argument. It was all a plan to damage my image, wasn't it?”

“If we're going there, then what you're saying right now is just to damage my image.”

Ookubo tilted her head and said what had to be said with a bitter smile.

“I just want to make a proper argument. So...”

She stated her new rejection of the Vice President's **2: Give the Musashi the ability to fight and use that power to cooperate with the other nations.**

“The nations that are now under P.A. Oda and Hashiba's control are Musashi's enemy. We can't get their cooperation, can we? In other words, the M.H.R.R. Catholics, K.P.A. Italia, Houjou, and western Qing-Takeda are all Musashi's enemy at this point. In that case, isn't it

impossible for Musashi to avoid war with powerful nations?”

That was not all.

She had rejected a small portion of it, but she needed to reject it on a more fundamental level. She had to reject the basis and ultimate objective of her opponent’s argument.

She prepared to give the most useful rejection for what was to come.

“Are you listening?” she asked. “You say you want to retrieve the Logismoi Oplo and stop the Apocalypse, but you don’t even know how to do that, do you? If you want to go on a journey to solve those mysteries, leave us out of it. The members of the Student Council and Chancellor’s Officers with too much time on their hands can go do that on their own. Besides, nothing says doing that will bring freedom or peace to the Far East. It may have worked as an excuse to get us out of the Battle of Mikawa and it may have helped Musashi make it this far, but now that we have retrieved Vicereine Horizon and she is safe and sound, how about we relax and let the nations with the other Logismoi Oplo decide what to do with them?”

So...

“Your objective has brought nothing but loss and it has no guarantee of success. Retrieving the Logismoi Oplo and stopping the Apocalypse gave us a justification to take back Vicereine Horizon, but its usefulness is more or less gone now. ...At the very least, it isn’t something Musashi can handle after losing a battle like that.”

Ookubo took a breath and swept a hand outwards. She heard a cheer from the crowd as that hand indicated the sign frame with her rewritten list of rebuttals.

●Vice President: Resistance Side

Objective: Take back the Far East’s status and achieve peace by retrieving the Logismoi Oplo and stopping the Apocalypse.

1: Stop Hashiba.

X: We already lost to Hashiba.

X: Not allowing Hashiba’s rule means opposing the Testament.

2: Give the Musashi the ability to fight and use that power to cooperate with the other nations.

X: War with the many powerful nations under Hashiba’s control would be

unavoidable.

X: Musashi is on its last chance, so how can we take such a large gamble?

3: End the provisional rule and request the expansion of the world at the Peace of Westphalia.

X: Just as with 2, there is no guarantee the other nations will cooperate.

X: There is no sign of the rule ending, so can we really do that?

Ookubo gave the Vice President a powerful look and spoke.

“That about sums up the current situation. I could expand on some of those topics, but I want to avoid getting too fixated on any one thing.”

The Vice President, however, did not respond. That was why Ookubo turned to Oriotorai.

“Sensei, I have played all of my cards. You can let the Vice President have a turn now.”

Oriotorai, however, did not respond to her prompting. She simply looked next to Ookubo with a look of surprise. Drawn by that look, Ookubo looked there too.

The Vice President had raised her right hand a little.

“Sorry, Ookubo. I have something to say about your goal and policies. I am here as a representative of the current Student Council and Chancellor’s Officers, but from my point of view, I would like to say something about your goal and policies. And...”

Here it comes, thought Ookubo as she inhaled and mentally prepared herself. But...

“I will not be rejecting them.”

...*Eh?*

Ookubo had assumed a rebuttal was coming. After all, she had just done that herself by protesting the Vice President’s goal and policies.

But the Vice President had a different view.

“There is no point in us rejecting the future you have suggested, Representative Committee Head. We accept that future has value. ...That is what I am saying.”

The Vice President announced that she had abandoned her chance to attack.

Chapter 61: Comparer on the Scales

第六十一章

『比較台の比較者』

並びあって行くなれば
並ぶという意味を
知らねばならない
配点 (認める事)



If we are to advance together

We must know what it means

To be together

Point Allocation (Acceptance)

Masazumi slowly exhaled.

She relaxed her body and opened her mouth.

She was grateful that Ookubo had gathered the people's attention and silenced them with her eloquence.

Like this, a short and relaxed statement would reach them.

...This should reach everyone.

With that in mind, she spoke.

"Allow me to reiterate something."

Reiterate what?

"The current Student Council and Chancellor's Officers swear that we will not reject the Representative Committee Head's suggestion."

"Heh. A standard principle. I see no reason to be surprised."

In the hilltop tent, a gentle breeze washed over the sun nudist as he held a glass in one hand.

"A politician must listen to everyone's opinion. That is true even in an absolute monarchy. ... After all, the king holds the right to determine whether the people live or die. He must listen to the people, both to search out useful opinions and to make use of that right."

Next to him, Terumoto laughed quietly as she viewed the *signe cadre*. Her eyebrows were raised in a thin smile.

"Musashi's Vice President just made something very clear. She said..."

She said...

“She’s the one in charge of Musashi’s politics. And they had better remember it.”

Terumoto looked to the Reine des Garous who sat across from her.

“Hey, you haven’t met that Vice President, have you? ...This isn’t your area of expertise, but what do you think?”

“There is only one thing I could think. This is the Prime Minister of my daughter’s king. ...Of course she will be just as, if not more, troublesome than my daughter. After all, she holds a higher position than my daughter.”

The Reine des Garous added a “but” with a smile.

She grabbed her cup and used her lips to pull in and peck at the film of milk fat that had formed on top of her café au lait. Then she licked off what had stuck to her lips.

“That Representative Committee Head has been on the Musashi along with those children. She will have seen the Student Council election, the previous special student general assembly, and the records of the past meetings. The most troublesome people are always the ones on your own side.”

She then viewed the *signe cadre* while resting her breasts on the table.

“Now... This is about to get brutal.”

Ookubo inhaled.

Heat and a tremor had entered her body for just a second, so she sucked in some chilly air for an adjustment.

She was inside the Ariake. When they had first arrived here, she had disliked the smell of oil, steel, and scorched metal when she woke up in the morning, but she barely noticed it anymore.

She often visited the work sites to check on the construction progress and the status of urban functions such as welfare and the distribution of goods.

She now understood that the city’s smells changed depending on the time of day.

She had learned all about the Musashi as a part of the Ariake. So...

...That's right.

The Vice President had just said she would not reject her suggestions.

That was not submitting or surrendering to Ookubo. As a Musashi politician, she would accept what she needed to accept and then use whatever aspects of it she could.

But, thought Ookubo.

...I won't let this end so easily.

Ookubo pushed up her glasses and viewed the Vice President through the lenses.

"Do you understand that I'm not just presenting you with a summary of the people's opinions?"

"Judge. Of course. And I'm saying I accept that you're here." The Vice President spoke calmly. "As the Representative Committee Head, you have the right and duty to take an active role in politics. And as a fellow politician, I will take what you say under consideration if you tell me I'm wrong. After all, you have the necessary knowledge of politics and your position prevents you from saying anything carelessly. Otherwise, no matter how eloquent and forceful you were, you would only be giving me the desires of a single citizen who hasn't seen the reality of the situation and all the factors involved. ...Or is that all you came here to do?"

"No, I came here for a debate between politicians."

She corrected her wording. Calmly and in a different tone than normal, she spoke the words needed for an official confrontation.

"I wish for a confrontation."

"Are you prepared for that?"

She knew what the Vice President meant by that.

From here on, they would be betting their status as politicians on this.

I see, she thought as she saw the Vice President smile a little.

"Besides, do you know what we will be discussing from here on?"

"If we are thinking the same thing, it goes without saying."

Despite saying that, Ookubo swung her arm outward.

She indicated the people down below.

“Do you know what it means to win?”

“I do,” said the Vice President. “If I defeat you but no one is willing to follow me, then I have lost. That’s what you mean, isn’t it?”

...*Yes, this is it.*

Yoshiyasu thought that as she leaned on the railing and looked between Mogami’s multilayer city and the sign frame.

“So it’s about public opinion.”

“Not just that,” said Yoshiaki.

She knew that. Or perhaps she should say she *had known* that.

Since Yoshiaki stood next to her, the people down below would bow and greet them as they passed by. But...

“I’m not the one those people are greeting.”

“That is a twisted way of looking at this, but perhaps you need to start with that kind of assumption. ...Yes, it is true those people are greeting me through you rather than actually greeting you. They do not really know who you are, but because I brought you here, they can increase my reputation by greeting you.”

The vassal next to Yoshiyasu tilted her head and looked between Yoshiyasu and Yoshiaki.

“Can I ask what you mean by public opinion?”

“Of course,” replied Yoshiaki while handing the vassal and Yoshiyasu individually wrapped sweets.

They were Surprise Manju Chocolates, which were sold in Satomi as well. Warring States commanders had been manju-ized (as opposed to anthropomorphized) and the manju acted as a talisman with an illegible description of the commander written in Far Eastern.

“Ah!” said the vassal. “I got the super rare Nagano Narimasa! When I get back, I can show it off to Persona-kun and the Chancellor!”

“Heh heh. It’s all about knowing where in the carton the box was and where in the box the

package was.”

I got Tsuchiya Masatsune, but it looks like it's normal rarity. How do they decide what is and isn't rare?

But, said Yoshiyasu in her heart. When she bit into it, the savory aroma seemed to break apart in her mouth and press the salty sweetness into her cheeks.

“So basically, I need to believe that *I am me*, right?”

“Exactly.” Yoshiaki looked across the multilayered city. “This city always had a unique regional structure, but building it up to this scale, building in entire farm blocks, and reusing the fallen snow were all additions from my generation.”

“There must have been a lot of opposition in the public opinion.”

“Of course.” Yoshiaki hid her smile behind her fan. “After all, I did that at the same time as I crushed the opposing forces within Mogami territory. If I had not made the belowground paddies first, I would likely have been destroyed.”

“Due to lack of food?”

“No. ...We can sell rice. With the belowground paddies, we could grow rice for a longer period without relying solely on the summer season. Mogami has excellent water and we can make wonderfully pure rice with it, so we sold it to the other nations for use as presents or in processed goods. By selling it to Sviet Rus, Date, or using the sea route along the coast of the Baltic Sea, we can gather foreign currency. And by selling it to the people in the resistant forces of our own nation, we can pull them toward us. It also prompted population growth, so we reached this point in about twenty years.”

“Twenty years?”

“Heh heh,” laughed Yoshiaki. “Yes, twenty years. It sounds fast and yet it also sounds slow. ...In the twenty years it took to give Mogami its current form, there were those who protested my actions and those who supported me. And now Mogami has nearly reached the form I wanted and the form those who followed me wanted.”

“I can almost hear the triple complaint of ‘Just make a normal city, let's cooperate with the others in our territory, and don't become a selfish ruler’.”

“But it was not the complainers who shaped reality. It was me.” Yoshiaki turned toward Yoshiyasu. “Listen. If a nation is not changing, it will be destroyed. After all, other nations exist. ...So if you listen to the people telling you to stop, you will have peace within your nation, but you will be destroyed as the other nations prosper. Besides, a nation that does

everything the standard way is no different from a corrupt nation that effectively lets the bureaucrats rule. The only difference is that one of them is aware of the corruption. And who is it that knows the most about their own and other nations?”

“The ruler,” said the vassal. “Which would be the Chancellor and Student Council President...normally, anyways.”

Adding that last comment was proof she was from Musashi, but she had likely understood what this meant. Yoshiaki nodded toward the vassal.

“If you understand everything inside and outside your nation, you just have to do what it takes to win. And do it in a constantly changing world. The complainers, unfortunately, hope for something other than what will let you win. And most of the complaints I heard were not actually the same as that triple complaint you mentioned, Yoshiyasu.” Yoshiaki covered her mouth with her fan. “They were telling me to stop playing dirty. Heh heh. But launching surprise attacks on the resistant forces and prompting them to betray each other was just so much fun. How could I have stopped? There are some things a fox simply cannot do.”

“I bet you made a lot of enemies.”

“More of them decided to join me. That’s why Mogami exists as it does now. ...It’s true there were some who, right up to the moment of death, refused to believe that someone who doesn’t play fair could win. They must have found it incomprehensible that their ideals had no bearing on reality.”

Do you understand?

“Reality is not an ideal. That is why it is reality. And whatever form reality takes, it is those who survive who hold it in their hands. Call it unfair, incomprehensible, or dirty if you like, but those who work toward survival are the ones blessed by reality. That is why a king must continually work toward winning. If any complaints or suggestions will help them win, they must accept them and strengthen themselves with them, but if they will lead to stagnation and defeat, they are a faulty argument, no matter how convincing the argument seems. And the opposite is also true. After all...”

Yoshiaki leaned over the railing and looked to the multilayered city.

“You could make a convincing argument why this city is impossible.”

“It is an abnormal city that can only exist in this frozen land.”

“Yes.” Yoshiaki narrowed her eyes. “Be abnormal, Satomi. ...Oh, but that does not mean it is okay to have such a flat chest.”

“Th-that is not abnormal! It’s just simpler! Right, Yoshiyasu-san!?”

Don’t ask me to agree with you... thought Yoshiyasu as she looked away, but she thought she understood what Yoshiaki was getting at.

“So if you show off a clear form of victory, people will follow you?”

“Everyone wants to win, you know? ...All that remains is how well that form of victory suits you. To put it another way, there are as many forms of victory as there are people suited to be king. But you are stuck at the level of suggestions and complaints. I imagine the people above you were very skilled and they had their suggestions and complaints for you. But Satomi, you are now in a position where there should be no one above you. In this world, you must not so readily accept biased suggestions or stagnant complaints. Instead, you must create your own form of abnormal that keeps you on the move and changing. Also...”

Yoshiaki opened another sign frame and enlarged it. It displayed Musashi’s Vice President and Representative Committee Head.

“I wonder if this Representative Committee Head is the same as you. And we have yet to see whether this Vice President can use the complaints and suggestions presented to her in order to create her own version of the abnormal.”

Yoshiaki flicked the sign frame to split it.

She turned her back on Yoshiyasu and started to walk away.

“Come. There is something I would like to show you. I am sure we will have the answer to this debate by the time we arrive. That is...will Musashi become abnormal or will it sink into stagnation?”

Masazumi exhaled.

She relaxed her shoulders from within and thought to herself.

...I’ve still got a long way to go.

Ookubo still hasn’t gotten serious, she told herself.

This underclassman had an inherited name. In fact, she had two. Before the Battle of Mikawa, the Testament Union had authorized her inheritance of the names Ookubo Tadachika and Nagayasu. Her father had also had an inherited name and her family had been appointed as the Ookubo family, but when moving from Mikawa to Musashi, her father had chosen not to

take a position on the Provisional Council and had taken a different job.

On the other hand, neither Masazumi nor her father had an inherited name. They had failed to acquire one. So in this debate...

...I'm the one that's "borrowing her chest".

Ookubo has a fair bit there. A fair bit of what where? But I did hear that Mitotsudaira "lent her chest" and failed, so doing so with an inherited name must be dangerous if you're not careful. Since Ookubo has two inherited names, she must have put together a countermeasure for me "borrowing her chest". What am I even talking about anymore?

"Vice President, is there something on my chest...?"

"Don't worry about it. There was just something I should have already considered, since it has precedent."

"Maa."

Yes, yes. I doubt you know what I meant, so it's wonderful that you agreed with me. But...

...I need to smash the wall of stagnation.

She had to find a way of replacing stagnation with action.

She also wanted to learn what Ookubo truly thought.

Ookubo had inherited two names as a politician, so there was no way she was supporting stagnant politics. She would have predicted Masazumi's counterattack and she would know how quickly it would take people to comprehend the debate topic, so there had to be a true motive hidden behind all that.

The girl was still hiding a future of action that her stagnant complaints would lead to. So...

"..."

Now, then, thought Masazumi.

How much of myself have I retrieved since Mikawa?

This would be testing that. Both inside and outside herself, how much had she been remodeled along with the Musashi? What had she thought and considered to that end. That was what she would be asked.

So she said one thing first.

“Are you listening?”

She said it to no one in particular. And...

“The Representative Committee Head has listed out her complaints regarding our policy. I will now explain why our policies are what they are and then I will remove all of those complaints.”

In a few places atop a white surface below the sky, footage from within the Ariake was displayed on sign frames.

One such place was the top of the white cliff-like wall on the rear starboard side of the Ariake. A twenty meter torii-style sign frame displayed Musashi Vice President Honda Masazumi and Representative Committee Head Ookubo.

One of the people watching them there spoke.

“That flat politician still isn’t smiling. Will she be okay?”

It was Kimi. She wore a summer uniform and stood in the sky beyond the starboard hull.

She stood on some scaffolding. And rather than a board laid out for a foothold, she stood atop one of the supporting rods.

When the three nations had fired on the rear starboard side the day before, there had been no direct hits, but the explosive blasts, shockwaves, and wind had still battered the outer hull. Some of the armor had bent or shifted.

Scaffolding of hardened bamboo had been set up for an inspection and repairs and the tube-like ends stuck out into the sky.

However, the walking surface had yet to be added to the scaffolding. Only a course grid of bamboo had been built up vertically over a wide area of air.

“All of the bamboo is about thirty centimeters thick. They make for midair footholds over an area of about a hundred meters. They plan to add on an actual floor and make sure transport ships can fly up alongside it to carry in the armor panels, but they haven’t had time with all the effort going into the residential districts.”

Kimi spun around on a piece of bamboo about a dozen meters away from the outer hull.

Below her, thin clouds flowed by and the somewhat blue-tinted ground was visible.

“We’re over three kilometers up. ...What stage could be grander?”

Kimi stepped lightly through the sky. She moved only her ankles to leap to another bamboo about three meters away. She did not quite make it far enough, but she placed the tip of her toes on the end of the bamboo scaffolding and pulled herself in.

When she turned back, she saw the Ariake’s outer hull.

She saw three people there. Asama glared at her, her mother showed off her teeth with her hands on her hips, and...

“Samurai Girl, do you have your feelings in order yet?”

She called out to Honda Futayo.

...Honestly, I was wondering what she wanted us to do.

According to her mother, she was to help with Futayo’s training.

As far as Kimi could see, Futayo had had a lot on her mind. She had fallen from the wall during training and failed when she should have achieved victory in battle.

But according to Kimi’s mother, this was not just a slump.

“Mom... I just have to deal with this myself, right? Heh heh. Everyone wants a piece of me. Have I turned into my foolish brother?”

“Kimi, this isn’t a game.”

“I know that.”

Kimi could tell her eyebrows had risen in a smile. She gently grabbed her right side skirt and stepped back along the scaffolding with her right toe tip.

Then she stood on the edge of the bamboo with just her right toe tip. This meant only about two centimeters of her foot was touching the bamboo, but she looked to Futayo all the same.

“I will give you the scaffolding I just left. You should thank me.”

“Judge,” replied the girl. “Manager-dono, how can I complete this training?”

“If you...oh, right. Kimi! How much can she stab you!?”

“Heh heh. Mom, that’s simple. It’s ‘easy mode’. Write that with kanji and it means ‘stubborn hairiness’...wait, what is this!? It was supposed to be simple, but now it’s looking surprisingly hairy! Hey, Asama, what am I supposed to do now!?”

“Um, Toori-kun and Kimi’s mother? Kimi is always like this at school too, but is there anything you can do about it?”

“Hmm. I always leave her and Toori with you, Tomo-chan, so you and your friends can do what you want with them.”

Kimi smiled bitterly as Asama’s shoulders drooped to say that was hopeless.

That’s fine, thought Kimi. If you have any complaints, just come out and tell me. It’s up to me whether I listen to them, though.

...You won’t be able to make those complaints at school much longer.

They would graduate and there was the Apocalypse. She did not know what was going to happen, but that was why...

“It’s best to do everything you can to enjoy yourself as you are.”

Kimi placed her right hand on her summer uniform’s chest.

“Samurai Girl, stab me here even deeper than before.”

Futayo would know what she meant by “before”: when they had fought at Mikawa. Futayo’s blade had been unable to fully reach Kimi then.

“Try to do it properly this time.”

“Judge. I am grateful.”

Futayo bowed and made a light jump.

She was coming.

She immediately covered more than a dozen meters and landed on the scaffolding in front of Kimi.

As soon as Futayo jumped, she noticed movement on the sign frame on top of the Ariake.

Masazumi and Ookubo were facing each other.

...Masazumi.

She was fighting. As the Vice President who carried Musashi on her shoulders and as the representative of Musashi's intelligence, she was protecting what they had to do.

Both Futayo and Masazumi were from Mikawa. Futayo's father had had an inherited name, but neither of the girls did at the moment. But...

...I wonder...

Futayo wondered if a gap had opened between herself and Masazumi. There was a clear difference between the girl who was trying to protect Musashi and Futayo who was trying to recover herself. But...

"Now, then," said Masazumi. "Let us begin our confrontation anew."

Yes, thought Futayo as she landed on the scaffolding and faced forward.

Kimi was there. And she heard Masazumi speak.

"Are you ready?"

Yes, repeated Futayo in her heart as she leaned forward. She was preparing to give herself initial speed.

Then she spoke while imagining the speed inside her.

"We are ready."

Masazumi was, the others were, and Futayo was.

"We have never been more ready."

With her back to Masazumi's words, Futayo accelerated her body.

She moved forward.

Afterword

Now, that was Volume 4-B of Kyoukai Senjou no Horizon.

A Volume 4-B is a first for my career and it's thanks to all of you that I could do this. Thank you very much.

Now, the stage this time is Oushuu and Jouetsu, but when you look at Japanese history, the daimyo of this region were not as monolithic as we tend to picture them.

In games, they're given the simple image of an independent daimyo and his subordinates, but it was actually more like an alliance of nearby clans with the one major clan that represented them. So they weren't so much subordinates as they were allies.

So the further you move from the center, the easier it is to find infighting between the powerful clans and families. Shigenaga was from a clan like that, so he was basically a tsundere that would defy the Uesugi clan at every turn yet intercept any external enemies that showed up. To keep those energetic people in line, it feels like the main clans focused a lot on their position as managers of Kantou.

Even a schemer like Mogami Yoshiaki kept a focus on Onikiri's origin and took great care of the position of Ushuu Tandai inherited from the Muromachi Shogunate.

And the usual chat.

"You can continue with weird memories from your school days."

"Come to think of it, there was a guy in my class with the nickname of Stimulant. He got the name because he always acted like he was on stimulants. When we greeted him on the street saying "Hey, Stimulant! How you been!?", the old ladies walking by would turn back in surprise."

"That's a little too blunt of a nickname, don't you think?"

"Yeah, I was known as Nyo."

"Why?"

"Well, after we got our health exam results back, my nickname became Urinary Proteins. I thought it was hilarious, but during homeroom, the girls said it was too straightforward. So to match the music scene at the time, we shortened it to Nyo.^[10] When I showed up on stage

during the school festival, everyone was shouting Nyo. Jealous?”

“Isn’t that the kind of thing people usually try to forget...?”

Anyway, the background music this time was Ellegarden’s Salamander. I guess you could call it hard rock that makes me think of an aerial battle. And the lyrics are cool. But...

“Who best remembered the promise?”

I’ll leave it at that. The next part will be out after a month break, so wait a little longer.

August 2011. A suddenly chilly morning.

-Kawakami Minoru

Notes

1. ↑ Rusu means “away from home”.
2. ↑ The English words Sandal and Thunder are almost identical in Japanese.
3. ↑ The kanji used makes this a pun on the historical Taikoki by using the Japanese word for “drum”.
4. ↑ A sword technique of the Itto-ryu school.
5. ↑ Shakenobe can be literally interpreted as Salmon Stretch.
6. ↑ The term used for discussions here is “dangou”.
7. ↑ Pi sounds like slang for breasts in Japanese.
8. ↑ Mogami means “best” or “highest”.
9. ↑ Sagetsu means Left Moon.
10. ↑ Japanese for Urinary Proteins is "Nyou Tanpaku".